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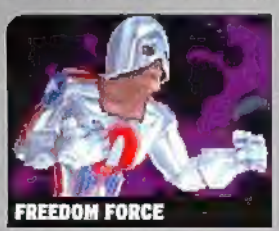
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▶ 2877.28.

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CEV TRI NEBULA 128 X 15.34

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ACQUIRE WARP TRANSMISSION

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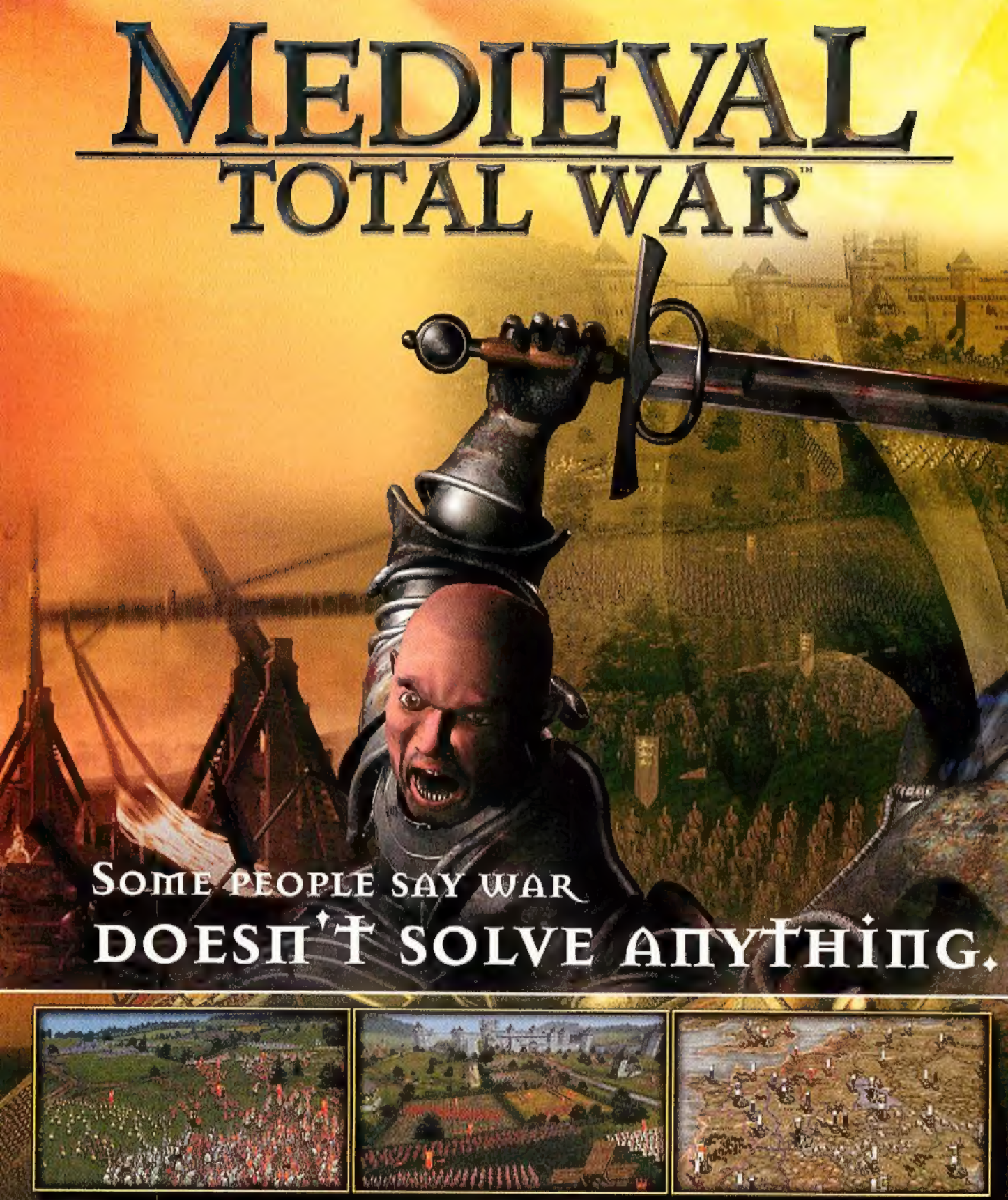

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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD August 2002 Issue #217

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Neverwinter Nights

CGW gets its dorky, sweaty, Hobbity hands on a near-final build of BioWare's epic *Neverwinter Nights*, and it looks like the hype was for real.

SPECIAL EDITION COVERS!

COVER ILLUSTRATION BY MIKE SASS

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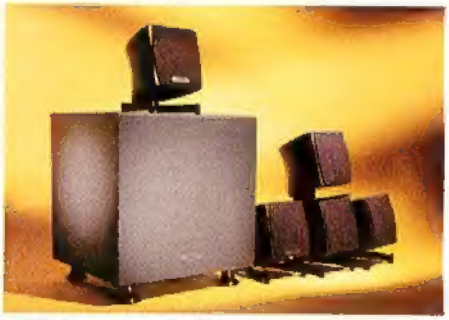

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It's all that an RPG should be.

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Bring Out Your Dead

The Star Chamber that is the *CGW* reviews meeting is generally a happy place, a cozy little den of lighthearted quips, high-spirited shenanigans, and fun-loving tomfoolery. The meeting is a process cherished in the three-sizes-too-small clods of meat that pass for hearts in the sunken chests of the *CGW* edit staff. Except this month. This month, the holiest of holies was forever stained by the ultimate throwback roster of games. "Throwback" as in, "Someone throw this crap back in the sewer and let the C.H.U.D.s have it."

It also was a throwback month in the sense that almost every game hearkened back to an earlier time in gaming. *BCT Commander* is every Ziploc-baggied wargame from 20 years ago. *PureSim Baseball* recalls the glory years of Lance Haffner text-based sports games. *Geneforge* is practically a 10-year-old *Ultima* product, and the two expansion packs we cover conjure up memories not only of their fairly recent source games but also of the games of three or four years ago that inspired them.

Someone throw this crap back in the sewer and let the C.H.U.D.s have it.

Don't get me wrong. Being a throwback doesn't necessarily mean the game sucks. *Morrowind* is a throwback to every weekend-eating high school *D&D* campaign I ever played. When a game can draw upon the fond memories of gaming past while exponentially improving upon that initial inspiration—as *Morrowind* does—it's cause to proclaim, "This is good indeed." But when a throwback squanders years of goodwill and happy memories the way *Might and Magic IX* does, the effect is a lot like a *Facts of Life* reunion special and suddenly the prospect of putting a bullet in your head—slowly, by pushing it in like a tack with your thumb—seems appealing.

It's just hard to get excited about a better version of the same old thing. Cher can keep having her excess facial skin knotted into an egg-shaped ball on the back of her head, but don't you think you've pretty much seen her by now? Gamers crave the next big thing, and let's face it, this month the gaming industry let us down. Thank God next month's lineup is looking sharp already. *Grand Theft Auto III* is finally out on the PC, the groundbreaking *Neverwinter Nights* should be finished and consuming all of our free time, and who knows what else might turn up. We saw some amazing-looking games at E3 this year. Hopefully some of them, when finished, will restore the sacredness of our reviews meeting.

Robert Coffey
Reviews Editor

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Address nonsubscription related questions and feedback to: *CGW* Editorial, 50 Beale Street, 12th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94105. Or you may contact us via: CGWletters@ziffdavis.com; phone: (415) 357-4900; or editorial fax: (415) 357-4977. Website: www.computergaming.com

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Regional Sales Manager/Midwest and East Coast Territory **Marc Callison**
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Regional Sales Manager/Midwest and East Coast Territory **Ian Sinclair**
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Account Executive/Northwest Territory **Meighan O'Rourke**
meighan_orourke@ziffdavis.com (415) 357-4920
Senior Marketing Manager and Creative Director **Rey Ledda**
rey_ledda@ziffdavis.com (415) 547-8775
Marketing Coordinator **Wayne Shiu**
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tipler_ubbelohde@ziffdavis.com (415) 357-4930
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Letters

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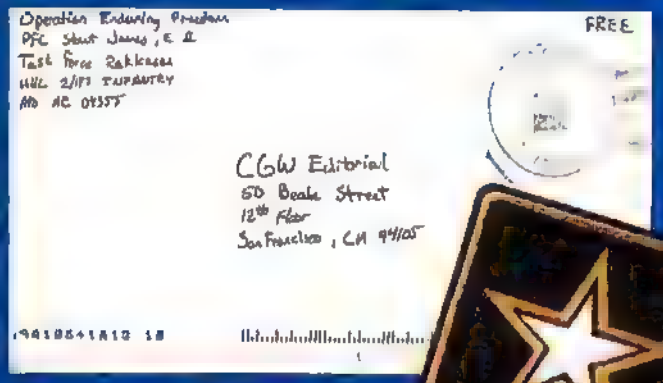
LETTER OF THE MONTH

In the Trenches

I am with the 2/187th Infantry over here in Afghanistan, and I just wanted to say thanks for writing such a good magazine. When things get a bit slow here, I usually pick up the copies of *CGW* that my family sends me. I read every issue from cover to cover about three times, but it never gets old. I am an avid gamer, and your magazine is a good way to escape the war, even if only for a short while. Once again, thank you.

PFC James E. Stout II

P.S. Gaming definitely not like the real thing. A lot safer, though.



LAN Party Tips

I just read your "how to" on hosting a LAN party (June 2002). As a mom who has allowed her 17-year-old son to host several of these, I'd like to say that you left out some crit cal steps.

1. Invite lots of unwashed youths into your home.
2. Clear everyth ng breakable out of the computer area.
3. Make sure there s room for everyone's computer without placing them close enough to engage in heated elbow fights.
4. Spend hours hooking things up.
5. Feel sorry for the one guy who can't get networked and is the same guy who couldn't get networked at the last LAN party.
6. Alternately make fun of the guy who can't get networked by point ng out that even the Mac users have managed to network themselves.
7. Order pizza.
8. Come to grips with the reality that you must sacrifice your own computer to the guy who can't get networked—interrupting the intense single-player game of *Alice* in which you've been indulg ng.
9. Rea ize how naive you were when you ordered pizza the first time and order more.
10. Begin to wish you'd demanded that decaffeinated drinks be consumed—usually around 4 a.m.
11. Fall into a disheveled and distraught state of half sleep, only to be awakened and have to stumble bleary-eyed into sunlight to greet the parents of those kids without cars of their own. Stand with an inane smile on your face while waving goodbye, hoping desperately to be mistaken for a normal parent.

mikebeth

Operation Flashpoint Versus *Quake*

I just read the first two letters regard ng *Operation Flashpoint* in your June 2002 issue. I notice that in addition to expressing their hate for *OFP*, they use immature language. Coincidence? I think not. Especially the moron who said *Quake* is a more realistic wargame. *Quake* is not even a wargame! They gripe just because they don't have the hardware to run the game with max mum graphics at the maximum frame rate, nor do they seem to have the skill to play a game without saving every time they kill one person without dying. Anyway, I completely agree with your opin on on *OFP*. It definitely deserves recognition as one of the biggest surprises of the previous year.

Kenneth

"Is it just me, or does *CGW* really like to pump up games that have the word *sim* in them?"

Our Mothers Thank You

This is actually not a complaint to your magazine—it is one of the few compliments. For a few weeks I was disgruntled with your magazine. It may have been because there was nothing of interest for me, because you reviewed games I didn't like, or because I disagreed with the reviews. But recently, my opinion for the magazine has greatly changed. The covers are great, the articles are great, game reviews are OK, and previews are great. The best issue, in my opinion, was your most recent issue (June). The cover was definitely the best I've seen in weeks, and the *Star Wars* preview words can't explain how awesome it was. I started reading and by the end of the preview, my mouth had dropped and the page was wet from drool. Loved the poster, loved the reviews. I don't think there was anything I didn't love. You're doing a great job. Keep up the good work.

Sean McCloskey

CGW's Sim Love

Is it just me, or does *CGW* really like to pump up games with the word *sim* in them? C'mon, *The Sims*. *Hot Date*—what kinda garbage is that? I want to know what you guys really think about *The Sims*. I might read the reviews on games like *SimCity 4* and other junk games to

MAIL BITES

I have found many technical retards in my life but none that compare to William O'Neal.
C-TUB Fisher

If Wil O'Neal ever dies, can I have his hair? I mean it's REALLY cool
Jennifer Larson-Burke

I enjoy your mag-let me know if you ever feel compelled to trade jobs with someone trapped in a cubicle farm tended by a pointy-haired devotee of pop psychology.
Glen Phipps

So who is the idiot who hired the *Penny Arcade* guys? Just think, it actually takes TWO people to come up with that comic strip! Maybe if you upgraded to Nickel or *Dime Arcade*, there would be a trace of humor somewhere in it.
Jess

"For the love of gaming, do not, I repeat, DO NOT put good games on the cover!"

find out about them, but I'm usually too busy playing real games. To tell you the truth, I don't even think I would read about *SimCity* while on the toilet—I would probably fall asleep. I've read *CGW* for years now and know that it's cool. It just seems like it's slipping a little. Besides, the people who do play those crappy games don't even read about 'em. Magazines just put it on the cover to let people know it's now in stores.

Tim Neal
North Carolina

I can't believe how much press a stupid game like *The Sims* is getting!!! Does every person who works for *CGW* like this game? The problem with this game is that it sucks. I don't like having to deal with the REAL-world chores of getting the kid up, making dinner, getting the wife up and off to work, and entertaining neighbors. Why do I want to get on my computer and do the same freaking thing for hours on end? I was just wondering if I was the only person who loves computer games but hates this game and all the hype about it.

Allen Ray

Wishy-Washy Reviews

Rails Across America is *CGW*'s "Best Game We Just Don't Get" (Apr 2002)??? I can't figure you guys out. *Black & White* is a great game that you rightly praised, giving it an Editor's Choice award, but then you put it down later by saying that it's just not any fun. I've become addicted to *Rails Across America*, which you also gave an Editor's Choice award, but now you say you just don't get it. You know, a year ago I thought *CGW*'s biggest problem was its penchant for overly enthusiastic previews for games that wound up blowing chunks. Now I would have to say that *CGW*'s biggest problem is deciding that a game stinks after raving about it in a review. *CGW*: Best Magazine I Just Don't Get.

Martin

I'd like to comment about your review of *Black & White: Creature Isle* (May 2002). I can't believe you gave it only 1.5 stars! I would give it at least 5 stars. Well, maybe 4 or 3 stars. Well, 2 stars wouldn't be bad. OK, never mind, you were right.

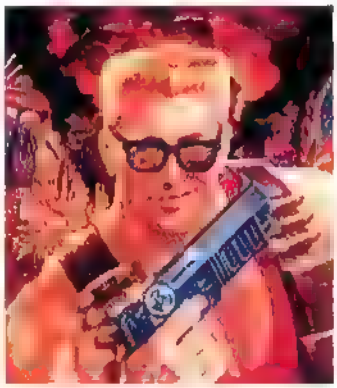
Robert Gelp

CGW Cursin'

To my dear *CGW*:
I again write to you with deep concern. This time, not with your magazine in mind, but with the future of gaming! While digging through the couch looking for change to go hit the nearest Taco Bell (sorry to hear about yours), I found the August 2000 issue of *CGW*, an E3 issue, and decided to give it a glance through. After a few seconds, I realized that all the games you put on the cover did NOT turn out to be the genre-shifting, incredible games you thought they would be.

Instead, a few were canceled (*Obi-Wan*, *TWINE*), some still haven't been released (*Halo*, *Dragon's Lair 3D*), some sucked (*Black & White*, *Oni*), and at the very best some offered some decent gameplay but did not reshape gaming as we know it (*Wolf 3D*, *Alice*, *Tribes 2*, *Monkey Island 4*, *Metal Gear Solid*). So for the love of gaming, when E3 comes around this year, do not, I repeat, DO NOT put good games on the cover! Instead, head over to the stall for the new *Survivor* game or slap the new *Law & Order* game on the cover. Just stay the hell away from Warren Spector!

Edward Pullman



Duke Nukem, Ever?

Are you playing an evil trick on us loyal readers? What's this with *Duke Nukem Forever* having a release date of fall 2008 (Pipeline, June 2002)? Two thousand and EIGHT!!?? It's either a misprint or some sadistic joke...in either case, FIX IT!

Adam Clark

Let's just say that we really *hope* it's a joke.

We Have a Bad Feeling About This

On page 66 of issue 215, you mistakenly stated that there were "at most four Jedi running around" in the movies. Luke, Darth, the Emperor, and Yoda. What about Mr. Obi-Wan Kenobi? He is a Jedi. If my simple addition is correct, that would mean that there were actually five. I just wanted to point out your mistake to make me feel better about myself. So from now on, please [be accurate with] the spectacle that is *Star Wars*, or else us *Star Wars* dorks will chase you down with our plastic lightsabers.

Jeff Massie
Oklahoma

We're *Star Wars* dorks, too. We just can't count.

OK, *Star Wars Galaxies* will be the bomb, but do we have to hear about it every month? *CGW* has hyped it so much you would swear that ZIff Davis is now owned by Sony or George Lucas. Half of the June issue seemed to be dedicated to *Star Wars* hype. On the other hand, June was also the first issue in several years that I didn't have to rip out those damned fold-out ad pages on the front or back covers; that was some consolation.

Brian McMahon

Usually, I enjoy your magazine and find your reviews to match my own taste. Yeah, your juvenility can get to me sometimes, but mostly you people have high quality writing and reviews. Recently, however, I purchased your March 2002 issue (outside North America, we don't get *CGW* until it's completely outdated), and found the review of one of my most despised games, *Star Wars Galactic Battlegrounds*.

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood
Violence

WARCRAFT III
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EVERY HERO LEAVES A LEGEND...

I was prepared to see you destroy the game, utterly wipe it out! But I read the review, and I find blindness and hypocrisy. Maybe [the reviewer] played the game blind and deaf?! Not one word about the terrible voice acting (Lando sounding like Tony Soprano, Darth Vader with bad lines and an accountant's voice, and so on), the bad graphics that made Darth look like a cute little black-and-red spot, or the lack of immersion.

I mean, basing a game on an existing engine is one thing. Making it look like a mod of that game is something else! It really felt like a *Star Wars* mod of *Age of Kings*. GET IT RIGHT NEXT TIME, *CGW*!

Unknown Person

Enough With the Xbox

I have always enjoyed and respected William O'Neal's articles in the past, but in this month's *CGW* [Tech Medics, June 2002], I was VERY disgusted, when at the top of a guy's simple PC question, he remarked, "You know, you can play *Max Payne* on an Xbox"!! My stomach turned and all respect went out the window.

Yeah, why waste $150 on a good video card when you can waste $300 on a system with very little future, which offers only bland versions of great PC games. I have played *Max Payne* on the Xbox and it was horrible—mouse and keyboard is the only way to play such games. I would rather put my genitals in a blender than suffer through any more PC shooters on a console. Do not get me wrong; I am not anticonsole. In fact I have PS2 and GC and love them both, but I love them for their console games, not PC ports.

You are entitled to your opinions, but please don't utter your great COMPUTER magazine with suggestions that someone abandon the great art of PC gaming for a shoddy POS console.

Jason C. Kessler

"I would rather put my genitals in a blender than suffer through any more PC shooters on a console."

You're entitled to your opinions too, Jason. Just please don't go putting your genitals in a blender over the matter.

At Least We Have *Duke Nukem Forever* to Look Forward to...

Who does Gabe Newell think he is anyway? Oh yeah, he's a gaming god...oh, but then again, he's managed to ship only one game so far. Where's *Team Fortress 2*? Valve doesn't even bother to pretend that this game is still in the works. And what about *PowerPlay*?

And now Valve thinks that they can decide the future of PC gaming distribution by introducing this Steam bullcrap [Read Me, June 2002]? I'm not about to declare the end of PC gaming, but once I'm no longer able to buy a game on a CD and know that I will have that game as long as I care to keep it in my collection (as opposed to having it sit on some centralized server that will probably wind up in a dot-com fire sale two months later), I will say goodbye to PC gaming and buy an Xbox.

If Valve wants to revolutionize gaming, why don't they try to ship another great game like *Half-Life* instead of trying to take another of our rights as gamers away? Copy protection is already keeping some games from working on various PC configurations, and now we may not even be able to keep the software we've legally licensed on our own computers? I never thought I'd say this, but I hate Valve.

John Shipley

Eh?

Hello, *CGW*. I like to say "Today is Tomorrow," meaning that technology is at its best, and due to the lack of the ticking of time I fear technology has stopped (kinda). I mean to say that technology is so great right now that it's hard to see anything possible for better technology or even discoveries. By any chances are there any discoveries towards computers or technology increases???? I may be stupid in asking this but I have to ask because I think you guys are the ones to give me access to this kinda access and I need info on the rumored *StarCraft II*.

Sky's the limit.

mR.qRiM
Dallas, Texas

OK. We're gonna back up slowly and walk away...

Correction

We printed incorrect Game Stats in our *Elite Force II* preview (July, page 50). The game's developer is Ritual Entertainment, and the publisher is Activision. The URL is www.ritual.com. The release date is the first quarter of 2003.

Penny Arcade BY MIKE KRAHULIK AND JERRY HOLKINS

I am ready to unleash hell. I am evil incarnate. I have got to find a bathroom.

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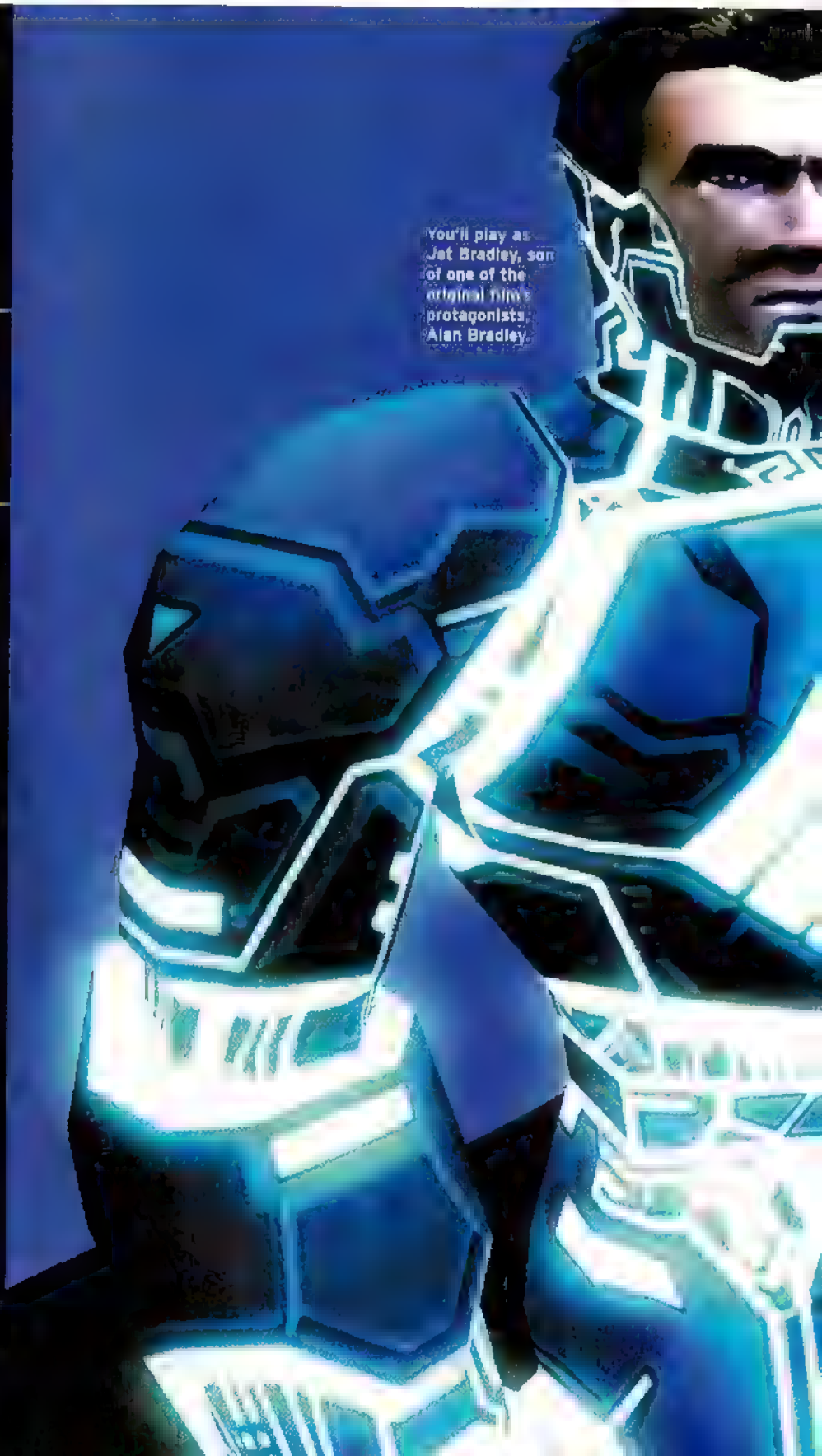
The hottest shots of the best new games Edited by Tom Price

TRON 2.0

Doom III made the biggest, loudest noise at E3 this year, and, yes, we liked it, too. But upstairs, away from the main show, Monolith was showing off the latest build of *Tron 2.0*, and this game looked brilliant, with a newly minted glow effect in the LithTech engine that contributes significantly to the game's stunning, unique look. *Tron* may not strike you as the world's coolest license (we had our doubts), but Monolith is handling it smartly, creating a whole new story rather than rehashing the Disney movie. Gameplay is influenced by the recent, already-classic *System Shock 2*. Monolith is on a major roll. Keep your eyes on this one.



You'll play as Jet Bradley, son of one of the original film's protagonists, Alan Bradley.

LithTech worked closely with Nvidia to get this glow effect working. You'll need at least a GeForce3 to see it, though you can play the game without the glow with a less powerful card.

For the 1982 film, animators added the glowing effect by hand.

DELTA FORCE: BLACK HAWK DOWN

The story of the dramatic battle of Mogadishu has found popular acclaim as a book and a movie. Now, thanks to NovaLogic, we'll see the game. Built on a heavily modified version of the C4 graphics engine, *Black Hawk Down* puts you in the boots of one of the brave Army Rangers or Delta Force members who fought their way out of the ambush that tragic day. You'll also have the option to play as a helicopter pilot or Humvee driver or one of their respective gunners. As all *Delta Force* games do, *Black Hawk Down* will feature fast-paced multiplayer.

A Ranger rappelling down from his Black Hawk.

You'll have access to a whole host of realistically modeled weapons as used by U.S. Special Forces at the time of the Mogadishu engagement.

The wreckage of a Black Hawk.

You'll take part in various raids and missions that were a part of Operation Restore Hope, not only the mission that led to the events depicted in the book and movie.

E3

Some people go to E3 to check out the latest games. Some people go to E3 for the parties and end up propositioning their boss, puking on themselves, or both at the same time. And some people rappel from the ceiling of the L.A. Convention Center. Those people would be Army Rangers, there to help promote the new *America's Army* game that debuted at the show. To find out more about that game and all the others we saw at this year's show, check out our report on page 22. As for who vomited and came on to Jeff, I can't tell you that. But think "intern."

PHOTO BY ANNIE L

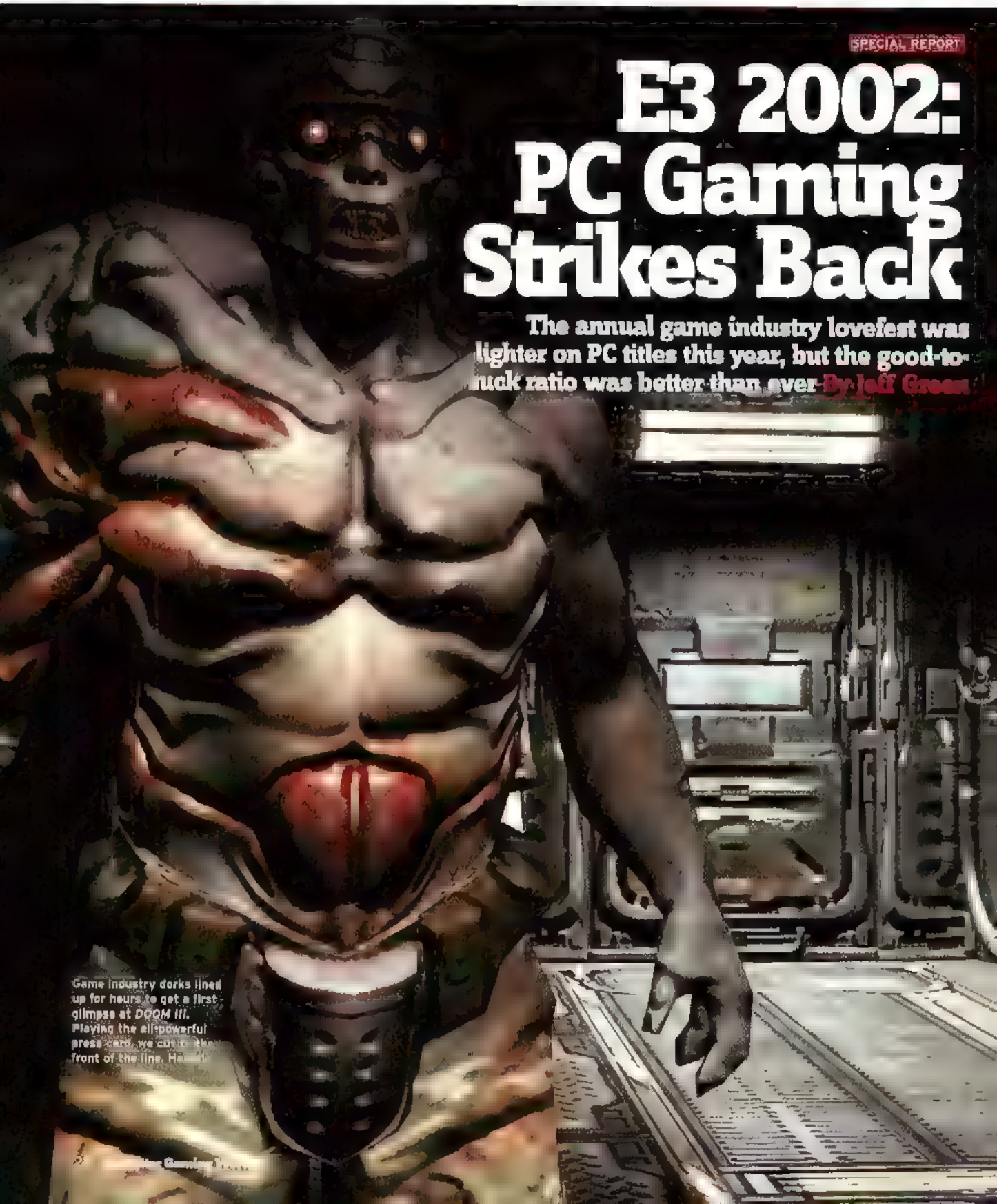
Read Me

A smorgasbord of news, opinion, and random stuff Edited by Ken Brown

SPECIAL REPORT

E3 2002: PC Gaming Strikes Back

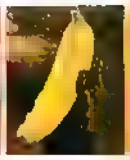
The annual game industry lovefest was lighter on PC titles this year, but the good-to-suck ratio was better than ever By Jeff Green



Game industry dorks lined up for hours to get a first glimpse at *DOOM III*. Playing the all-powerful press card, we cut in the front of the line. Ha...

INSIDE

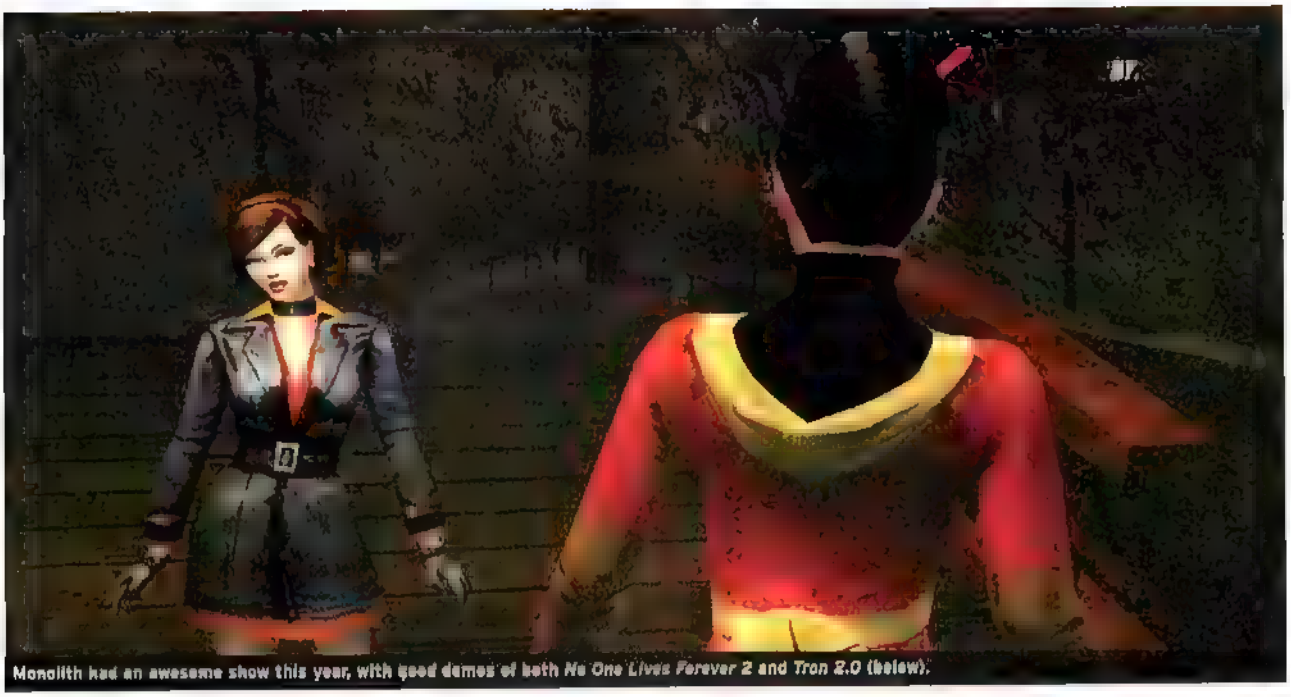
UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003
The blood sport is back, baby! **Page 28**



NOLF 2
Toss some bananas at French henchmen dressed as mimes. **Page 30**

OFF LIMITS
A Missouri judge decides that games are Bad for kids! **Page 32**

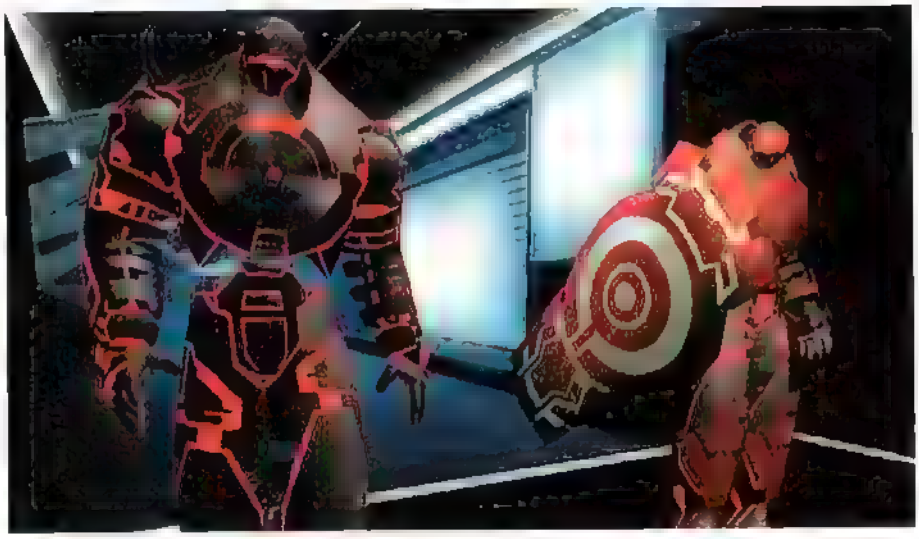
THE THING
How can a Thing so nasty look so good? **Page 48**



Monolith had an awesome show this year, with good demos of both *No One Lives Forever 2* and *Tron 2.0* (below).

The annual headache and hypefest known as E3 (the Electronic Entertainment Expo) rode into Los Angeles again this May, and once again the intrepid reporters of Team *CGW* traveled to cover it. Some of us even remembered to bring pens and shoes this year, which made the whole "reporting" process go that much smoother.

After last year's all-out console war, and the prior year's post-Columbine duck-and-cover act, this year's E3 was relatively subdued and business as usual—which isn't a bad thing. The best thing about it was that not once did we have to endure from anyone (including ourselves) last year's oft-repeated question "Is PC gaming dead?" That's because, for PC gaming, it was a great show. Not only was the undisputed Big Deal of the show a PC title—*Doom III* but elsewhere on the floor, lots of high-profile, sharp-looking PC games were holding their own.



In terms of hype and buzz, id Software's *Doom III* easily stole the show with a frightening, violent demo.

Killjoys

In terms of buzz, id Software's *Doom III* easily stole the show with a frightening, violent demo in an enclosed theater that had folks lining up literally for hours to see it. Once inside, most were not disappointed. With a sound system cobbled together by none other than Trent Reznor, the *Doom III* demo was an awesome sensory assault, and it achieved the one thing that everyone always strives for at E3: to get everyone talking.

It was a good—almost overwhelming—show in general for shooters, with *Unreal Tournament 2003*, *Unreal II*, *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero*, *No One Lives Forever 2*, *Star Trek: Elite Force II*, and EA's upcoming James Bond game *007: Nightfire* all making fine showings. We were also happy to finally see *Planetside*, Sony Online's long-in-development massively multiplayer shooter, back on display and looking good. We had been worried that this one had fallen down the same black hole that *Sovereign* seems to have vanished into.

High-profile MMORPGs were front and center at this year's E3, but this "smaller" game, Cryptic Studios' *City of Heroes*, drew some of the best reviews.

And although id may have stolen the show in terms of sheer noise, the upstarts at Monolith continued to show why they are fast becoming one of the industry's most valuable players. Not only did they have the extremely entertaining *NOLF 2* running, but they also scored big with the surprisingly cool *Tron 2.0*, and then, as icing on the cake, made the huge announcement that they had been pegged as the developers for *The Matrix Online*, a massively multiplayer game based on the hit movie franchise.

Massively Too Many Games

MMO games were the other big deal for the PC format at the show, with every game publisher and their grandma apparently hungering for a piece of *EverQuest*'s $13-a-month cash pie. The frightening thing was that so many of them had very strong showings. It's hard to see at this point how all of these games, no matter how good they are, can succeed when in direct competition with each other.

Sony itself was showing two *EverQuest* titles for the PC—the upcoming expansion *Planes of Power* and the absolutely stunning *EverQuest II*, which showed off some of the best graphics (on a GeForce4 card) of the show. Sony also scored big—along with LucasArts, of course—with *Star Wars Galaxies*, last year's Game of the Show, now playable and looking every bit like the monster game everybody is predicting—the suckiness of *Episode II* notwithstanding.

The other MMORPG heavy-hitters all had impressive demos, with Blizzard's *World of WarCraft*, Microsoft's *Asheron's Call II*, and EA's *The Sims Online* generating lots of buzz. The latter in particular looked incredibly fun, and successfully silenced the doubters who wondered how that game would translate online (buy an extra PC for your wife/girlfriend/mom now).

The MMO *City of Heroes* also made a big splash. Developed by upstarts Cryptic Studios and ncSoft (*Lineage: The Bloodpledge*), *City of Heroes* will let you go online and fight crime as virtually any costumed crusader you can imagine. Maybe we're still high from *Freedom Force* and the *Spider-Man* movie, but this game seems to have an extremely well-realized superhero setting, and we think it has the potential to be huge. Watch for more on this one soon.

Tastes Great, Less Filling

The console noise wasn't deafening like it was last year, but you'd still have to be in denial to not notice that there were far fewer PC titles shown this year than

E3 HIGHLIGHTS

Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided

The combat feature was working at E3, so we finally got to shoot some stormtroopers. *SWG* uses the D20 system like the Wizards of the Coast pen-and-paper RPG, and it does all the computations for combat invisibly while you blast the hell out of stormtroopers, womprats, and ewoks.

After you double-click to initiate combat, the combat queue pops up in the upper-right corner. You can either use default attacks, or insert special moves into the combat queue. Other combat factors include terrain (whether attacking to or from an elevated position) and postures (crouched versus prone). *SWG* looks like it'll have a good fusion of tactical RPG gameplay with visceral action. Visit starwarsgalaxies.com to see if you can join the beta test.

The Sims Online

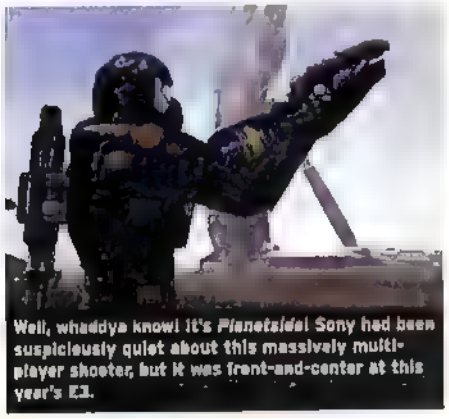
In *The Sims Online*, the world is your sick and twisted oyster. Naked clown beauty pageants, superhero cowboy bars, and exclusive mountain hideaways are just a few of the many strange possibilities this game offers. You can play in and shape the world as you see fit. Or unfit. You can do really strange, disturbing things, or you can build a dance hall in your bedroom. The game is so open, so willing to embrace user-made clothes and objects (just like *The Sims*), the potential for self-expression is enormous.

Command & Conquer: Generals

Combine the playability of *Red Alert 2* and *Yuri's Revenge* with the latest in 3D technology, and you've got *C&C: Generals*, a stunning strategy game that focuses on pseudorealistic, near-future combat. We saw some pretty awesome events. For example, when terrorists destroyed a dam to flood a nearby village, another player retaliated by nuking the terrorist headquarters! *Generals* is shaping up to be the sharpest and most visceral C&C title yet.

at any previous E3. But, again, there's no reason to interpret this as a bad thing.

The fact is, what was more noticeable than the lack of PC games was the lack of crappy PC games. Maybe it's because the wannabes and carpetbaggers looking for the next cash cow have packed up and moved on to the Xbox now, leaving just the real PC developers and true believers behind. Maybe it's because the big publishers are finally realizing what smart companies like Blizzard figured out years ago—that quality is a heck of a lot better (and potentially more profitable) than quantity. Whatever the reason, the net result was that there was much less garbage and shovelware like bull riding games this year, and far more actual PC games that gamers will want to play. In that respect, E3 was a grand success. So as much as we gripe about having to cover the show, we came back to *CGW* more optimistic than ever about the future of PC gaming.



Well, whaddya know! It's *Planetside*! Sony had been suspiciously quiet about this massively multiplayer shooter, but it was front-and-center at this year's E3.

EverQuest—it's back, it's monstrous, and it's calling your name.

America's Army: Operations

Free games are good. Free *Counter-Strike*-style games using the *Unreal II* engine are even better. Free *Counter-Strike*-style games developed by the government...well, that scares us a bit. But as long as there aren't any *Manchurian Candidate*-like subliminal mind control messages in *Operations* (there aren't), we'll play it until either our keyboards break or we head down to the recruitment office.

Republic: The Revolution

Elixir Studios' *Republic: The Revolution* continues to impress us as one of the most original, boldly ambitious, open-ended strategy games we've seen in ages. Think of it as *The Sims* meets *Dr. Zhivago*. Or something. Your goal is to overthrow a Soviet-style communist government, but how you do it—aggressively, subversively, diplomatically—is completely up to you. This one gets more impressive by the month. Keep your eyes peeled.

THE GOOD, THE

THE GOOD
FULL THROTTLE II

LucasArts drew applause and whoops of approval at a press event at E3 with the surprising announcement that they were working on *Full Throttle II*, a belated sequel to one of the company's great comic adventure games, released way back in 1995. Could the savior of the moribund adventure genre be a leather-clad outlaw biker? We hope so.

THE BAD
"BEST OF SHOW" PEDDLING

Look, we know you want to "win." We know putting a "Best of Show" sticker on your box probably guarantees, oh, maybe seven more sales worldwide. But the aggressive pimping of game titles now—often accompanied by gifts—in order to procure votes is getting a bit randy, and is giving the show an unhealthy "beauty contest" feel. Maybe we should stop writing "Best of Show" articles.

THE UGLY
THE SUBSTANCE TV LOT

In E3's past, the G.O.D. Lot was a nasty alternative show with half-naked chicks, midgets, and plenty of beer. When G.O.D. bit the dust we figured that was the end of it. But now G.O.D. is reborn as "SubstanceTV," some kind of DVD magazine thingie—so the lot was back. Except there weren't any games this year. Or anything interesting. Next year they should just open a beer stand.

FIRST LOOK

Doom III

Id aims to deliver beautiful, inescapable horror–will they succeed? By Thierry Nguyen

Anyone will tell you that *Doom III* was the most beautiful game at E3, a game that showed that id Software is the master of 3D engines. The 10-plus minutes of gameplay footage shown at E3 easily rivaled the best-looking CGI cut-scenes of the *Resident Evil* series, with the notable difference that there was actual gameplay instead of just canned cut-scenes. The demo was run on a 2.4GHz P4 with a next-generation ATI card, and it was hard to believe the images could move so fluidly.

It's easy to spot the next-generation "upgrades" of classic *Doom* enemies. The ubiquitous imps now do more than snarl and hurl fireballs, imps now pounce on you and stare you down with their beady, insectlike eyes. "Pinkie demons" (as id calls them) now feature mechanical rear legs, which make their leaps all the more terrifying. The new hell knight was so big and fast that he literally tore the player apart.

Id's main focus with *Doom III* is on creating a terrifying single-player experience. There will be multiplayer, but the options may be somewhat limited according to id god John Carmack. All of the technology, from the new 5.1 surround-sound engine to the rag doll physics, is put to the task of making a creepy game. Most of the time, as seen in the demo, you're fighting one critter, be it a zombie marine or a hell knight. One method of inducing fear is cutting to a third-person camera during key sequences; the camera might cut around the corner and show you a zombie packing a minigun, and then put you back in first-person to let you prepare for the coming firepower.

It'll be interesting to see the final product when it ships next year. *Doom* has always been known for its over-the-top action, stacking each level with horde upon horde of monsters. The more intimate focus of fighting only one or two enemies at a time, is an interesting one for id, and if nothing else, would make for a different sort of game from them.

Doom III has become Resident Evil in first person.

G.I. COMBAT

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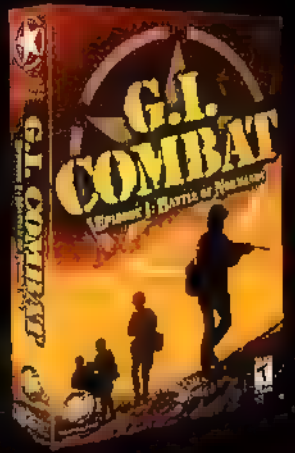

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TEEN T

Blood
Violence

HANDS ON

Unreal Tournament 2003

The blood sport is back in a big, big way By Tom Price

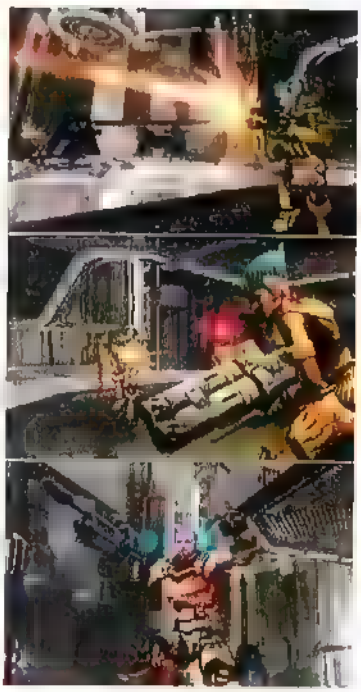
As of this writing, the retail release of *Unreal Tournament 2003*, the sequel to *CGW*'s 1999 Game of the Year, is a little more than a month away, and getting to actually play the game last week at E3 did little to tide me over. I want my *UT2K3* now! In the meantime, I'll have to be satisfied with memories of playing deathmatch against a group of other convention goers on a small LAN set up in the Infogrames booth on the show floor.

UT2K3 plays with the same fast-paced slaughter-groove that made the original *UT* so addictive. The game looks new and cutting-edge in terms of the graphics, but it still has that unmistakable *Unreal* aesthetic to it that made me feel warm and safe like I was wrapped in a warm blanket of glowing flak. No wait, that would hurt.

The levels and models are pumping much higher polygon counts this time, and I never saw a hint of frame rate drop or lag. Of course, I couldn't see the specs of the rig I was playing on either, but it must have been potent.

I really like the new default gun, it's way better than the Enforcer. And my all-time favorite *Unreal* gun, the Flak Cannon, hasn't been tinkered with too much, although it doesn't seem capable of bank shots anymore. And the rocket launcher can load up only three missiles instead of six. What do they expect a room spammer like me to do—develop some aim?

As I said, the playable version of *Unreal Tournament 2003* on display at E3 this year only made me hungrier for the final product. Stay tuned for more details on the maps and weapons and other goodies in next month's cover story. *UT2K3* should be our main reason for not leaving the house and staying pasty this summer.



It plays with the same fast-paced slaughter-groove that made the original *UT* so addictive.

Spells punishing: 26,875

Tournaments underway: 882

Creatures attacking: 49,438

Prizes on the line: 5,000

1 2

Deadly strategies: Unlimited

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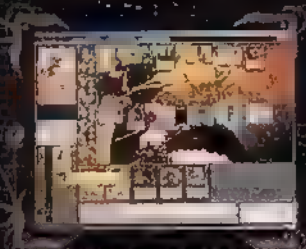
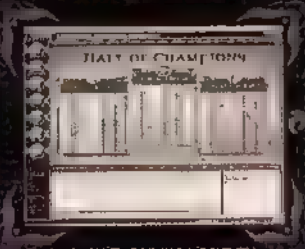


DEADLIEST STRATEGIES

MOST COMPETITION



BEST REWARDS

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HANDS ON

Back in Style

NOLF 2 stands alone again as a shooter with personality By Ken Brown

We've been half holding our breath to see if the humor and creativity that were hallmarks of *No One Lives Forever* would return in the sequel. We're as happy as henchmen with a good dental plan to report that our experience with *NOLF 2* at E3 showed us all the telltale signs of a new Cate classic.

If you missed our April cover story or you never played the first game (take a moment now to scrawl a large "L" on your forehead), the sequel is another campy '60s spy story featuring a beautiful British agent named Cate Archer. The artwork and storyline are inspired by movies like *The Avengers*, *Danger Diabolique*, *Modesty Blaise*, and perhaps a trace of *Austin Powers*.

Cate will have her hands full in the sequel, because H.A.R.M. is out for blood. Like any self-respecting evil organization whose wicked plans have been foiled, they've summoned the world's top assassins to crack our heroine's lovely skull like an egg. Meanwhile, the pesky Russians are plotting to draw the U.S. into World War III.

At Cate's disposal is another bizarre assortment of weapons and gadgets, including a crossbow, a lipstick spy camera, and something called the Angry Kitty Artificial Feline Proximity Mine. Designer Craig Hubbard's favorite new weapon is a banana that trips up henchmen and incapacitates them long enough for you to search them. Other shooters would never allow such whimsy, but using a banana in *NOLF 2* to disable evil mimes with French accents somehow seems perfectly appropriate.

The level designs also exhibit a sense of playfulness, as *NOLF* fans would expect. One level is set in a trailer park that is being torn apart by a tornado. Amidst flying debris (which can injure you) Cate must fight off a group of ninja assassins. The ninjas are fast and agile; they can lunge at you with their swords, throw shurikens, leap up on trailers, and block bullets with their swords. Cate has a few tricks too: She can climb onto cars to get lifted by the wind, or lure ninja into the path of a rolling trailer. Of course, it wouldn't be a *NOLF* game without elements that are completely over the top, so the next level takes place inside the twister.

Watch for *NOLF 2* to blow into town this fall.

One of Cate's new weapons, the banana, trips up henchmen and incapacitates them.

NEWS FEED

Jagged Alliance Finds a Home

■ Sir-Tech Canada has signed a deal with Strategy First to manage the *Jagged Alliance* strategy game series. Strategy First will take over all sales, distribution, and end-user support of *Jagged Alliance*'s back catalog, which consists of *Jagged Alliance*, *Deadly Games*, *Jagged Alliance 2*, and *Jagged Alliance: Unfinished Business*.

Strategy First president Don McFatridge said his company will "extend the title with new products in the years to come."

Sir-Tech is also seeking a publisher to take on its *Wizardry* franchise. Will Take2Interactive bid on it against a herd of Korean game companies? We'll bring you the answer when we find out.

XIII

■ It's nice to see a shooter that deviates from the norm. Ubi Soft's *XIII* tries to evoke a kind of graphic novel feel with its cel-shaded look. The game is based on the comic license of the same name from Belgium comic book author Jean Van Hamme, and it is being developed using the *Unreal* engine.

The storyline focuses on a character with amnesia who discovers he possesses high-level military skills and is involved in a conspiracy against the U.S. government, possibly involving the assassination of JFK. Watch for a full preview soon.

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Age:	Your age
Occupation:	Gamer
Cause of Death:	Murder
Coroner's Notes:	Victim found in the streets, lying in a pool of blood. He must now travel back in time across five different centuries to pursue his murderer and alter the course of events that led to his demise.

DA 210567

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LAW

Games Under Fire

Federal judge restricts violent games from minors; Congress debates new penalties for retailers By W. James Au

If you're 17 you can join the Army and learn how to kill with a bayonet, rifle, and grenade, but you can't legally buy *Ghost Recon* or *Operation Flashpoint* in St. Louis, Missouri. Local regulations there forbid minors from buying or renting violent games. A federal judge in St. Louis recently upheld the regulations, saying there's no basis for considering interactive games as different from baseball or Parcheesi.

The Interactive Digital Software Association, the game industry's lobbying group, had challenged the law on the basis of free speech. Judge Stephen N. Limbaugh, Sr., rejected the IDSA's challenge, saying interactive games contain nothing that can be protected under the First Amendment. Limbaugh wrote: "[There is] no conveyance of ideas, expression or anything else that could possibly amount to speech..." In video game content, Limbaugh said he considers interactive games the same as sports and board games; therefore, they can be regulated. To arrive at that decision, the judge viewed videotaped gameplay of *Doom*, *Mortal Kombat*, *Fear Effect*, and *Resident Evil* (which Limbaugh mislabeled as "*Resident of Evil Creek*").

Henry Jenkins, MIT professor and academia's leading expert on games, took issue with Limbaugh's ruling: "[Y]ou could just as easily have taken a look at *The Sims* and arrived at an opposite decision."

Doug Lowenstein, president of the IDSA, was equally taken aback. When his group filed for the dismissal, they cited a previous ruling from Seventh Circuit Judge Richard Posner, which stated that video games are speech. Does Limbaugh's ruling override Posner's? Not yet, according to Lee Tien, attorney for the Electronic Frontier Foundation. "Technically, no other court is bound by [Limbaugh's] decision," he says—unlike Posner's ruling, which binds all district courts in his circuit. But if the St. Louis ruling is upheld by a higher court, Tien says it will have equal legal weight.

In a related development, Democratic Representative Joe Baca of California cited Limbaugh's ruling when he introduced legislation titled Protect Children from Video Game Sex and Violence Act of 2002. If passed, the law would penalize retailers who sell or rent explicit games to minors. (As it targets games that portray "prostitution" and "car jacking," Baca might as well have called it the *Grand Theft Auto III* Act.)

The bill faces an uphill challenge. "It clearly restricts speech based on its content," Tien says. "[T]he problems with doing so are laid out in the [ruling] by Judge Posner." Says Lowenstein: "While we do take this bill very seriously, we don't see any real momentum behind it at this point."

But when elections near, or if another Columbine tragedy occurs, that could change.

Should games be protected under the First Amendment? A Missouri judge says no.

NEWS FEED

Max Payne 2

■ The sequel is coming, but it'll seem like bullet-time before it gets here. Take2Interactive says *Max Payne 2* is in development at Remedy Entertainment and Take2's Rockstar Games division. It is scheduled for release in 2003 for PC and console platforms.

Civilization III: Play the World

■ An upcoming expansion will add new civilizations and multiplayer support to Sid Meier's landmark strategy game. *Play the World* will have eight new leaders and civilizations, as well as specialized units for each culture. The expansion will also add new terrain sets; installations such as airfields, outposts, and radar towers; and interface enhancements such as unit stacking and auto-bombard. It will also feature complete game editor and scenario support, including feudal Japan and World War II unit packs, that will let players create scenarios from any time period.

The expansion will reportedly contain full multiplayer support for Internet, LAN, email, and hotseat games, and it will feature a turn-based mode, a simultaneous mode, and a new turnless mode. Coming this fall.

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BOOK REVIEWS

From Pong to PS2

The history of gaming in three easy lessons By Charles Ardai

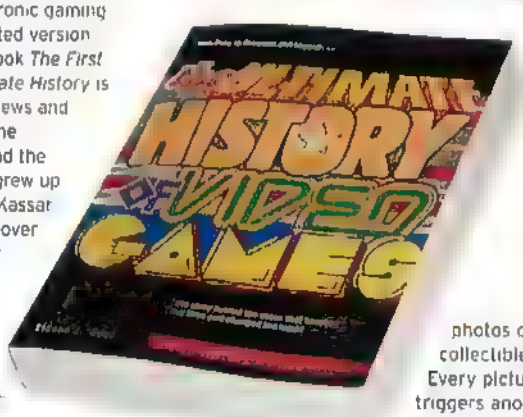
You know you've arrived when people start writing books about you—or you know you're getting old.

In the case of our favorite pastime, it seems to be a little of both. The recent slew of books seeking to chronicle the history of video games runs the gamut from respectful, footnote-laden textbooks to nostalgic coffee table books packed with photos from the days when *Pac-Man* reigned supreme and arcade games cost only a quarter.

The Ultimate History of Video Games

(Steven L. Kent, Prima Publishing)

Think the dot-com era was something? Wait till you read about the video game boom of the 1980s that launched Atari and transformed a 100-year-old playing card company (Nintendo) and a manufacturer of leathercraft kits (Coleco) into electronic gaming pioneers. An updated version of Kent's earlier book *The First Quarter, The Ultimate History* is loaded with interviews and anecdotes about the personalities behind the classic games we grew up playing. (Was Ray Kassar the man who took over Atari from founder Nolan Bushnell, a brilliant marketer or a cologne-soaked dandy despised by his engineers? Answer both.)



The book gets a little dry in the later years, and it doesn't have many pictures (only one skinny black-and-white section), but it still offers a good, detailed account of the birth of the industry.

High Score! The Illustrated History of Electronic Games

(Rusel DeMaria and Johnny L. Wilson, McGraw Hill)

No shortage of illustrations here. Although DeMaria and former *CGW* editor-in-chief Wilson tell many of the same stories as Steven L. Kent, their book is overflowing with color screenshots, package art, reproductions of old game ads, shots of old machines, and photos of collectibles. Every picture triggers another memory, and before long you're awash in blissful recollections. Amidst all this visual material, the authors manage to cram in well-written essays about major publishers, platforms, and individual games from 1961's *Spacewar* to 2001's *Halo*. Thanks to some amazing art direction, the book is clear, easy to follow, and visually irresistible. And thanks to the expert commentary of DeMaria and Wilson, you get the knowledgeable insider's account of all the field's milestones. Kent's blow-by-blow retelling of events may be more exhaustive, but *High Score!* is much more fun.

Supercade: A Visual History of the Videogame Age, 1971-1984

(Van Burnham, The MIT Press)

If ever a book needed a good redesign, it's this one. *Supercade* weighs a ton, won't fit on any bookshelf you own, and is full of "artistic" graphic elements such as out-of-focus photos and eyestrain inducing page layouts. Once you get past this nonsense, however, you'll find a thorough overview of the field's first decade and some provocative musings about the role electronic games have played in our society. Who among us can resist a book that opens by tying the invention of the video game to the development of the atom bomb?

REALITY CHECK

Reality Check compares the ratings of the major gaming press with GameRankings.com, which averages all published reviews for a particular title.

GAME	CGW	PC Gamer	CGM	Gamespot.com	IGN.com	Gamespy	GameRankings.com
Dungeon Siege	A	A	A	A-	A-	A-	A-
Ghost Recon: Desert Siege	A	A	*	B+	A-	*	B+
Global Operations	C+	B-	*	B+	B+	C+	B+
Heroes of Might and Magic IV	C-	B	*	A-	A-	B+	B+
Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast	A+	A	A	A	A	A-	A-
Warlords Battlecry II	A	A	A+	B+	A-	A-	B+

* NO RATING AVAILABLE AT PRESS TIME

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UPDATE

Age of Single Player

The gods look on in approval as Ensemble devotes major effort to a 35-mission campaign for *Age of Mythology* By Rob Smolka

The one glaring weakness in the *Age of Empires* games has been their single-player campaigns, and Ensemble Studios knows it. For the upcoming *Age of Mythology*, the Ensemble crew seems to be pulling out all the stops. They've written a huge script and designed a 35-mission campaign that takes you through the game's three major cultures (Greek, Egyptian, and Norse), punctuated with dramatic in-engine cut scenes.

At the outset, the player assumes the role of Arkantos, Atlantis' greatest hero. You must first lead your people to victory by fighting off enemies and establishing peace. Once you have accomplished that, you'll be sent off to the Greek colonies to help in their battle against Troy. There you will be reunited with your old friend Ajax, who needs your help. Along the way, you will make some powerful enemies (like Kamos the minotaur), as well as some impressive allies (such as Amanra, a Nubian warrior working for Egypt). You will also cross paths with some of the gods, leading you to dangerous adventures in the Underworld.

This focus on a single character should give *Age of Mythology* a cohesive feel from start to finish. The cut-scenes do a good job of involving you in the story. The game will also do its best to let everyone play through it by constantly adjusting the AI so as not to overwhelm new players. You can even change the level of difficulty between missions.

Still no word on the game's release date, but if history is any indicator expect it to ship sometime around Thanksgiving.

The focus on a single character should give *Age of Mythology* a cohesive feel from start to finish.

GET A LIFE

Four suggestions for drowning out the existential hum

The Standard Hotel, Los Angeles

What's not to like about a hotel that has models lounging in fish tanks and waterbeds in the lobby? During E3 we always visit the place the *L.A. Times* describes as "Barbarella meets Shaik Abdullah's *YOT*." Not even made an appearance one night with a bouncing bevy of bunnies. Yeah, he has a life.

Motorcycles

Don't spend your entire life being a wuss. Take a cue from resident sissy Jeff Green, who either got brave enough or stupid enough (you can take your pick) to buy and learn how to ride a motorcycle. Everyone knows that chicks dig bikers. Except those like Jeff who end up pinned under their bikes in their driveways.

Reservoir Dogs DVD

Watch two more gruesome angles of the famous ear-slicing in the 10th-anniversary special edition DVD of *Reservoir Dogs*. The release features more deleted scenes, new interviews, and four different covers (Harvey Keitel, Michael Madsen, Tim Roth, and Steve Buscemi). Be sure to snag this Tarantino classic when it hits stores on August 27.

15th Annual Cannabis Cup

The world's premier smoke-out is happening this November in Amsterdam. Thousands of dazed revelers will converge to sample the best bud in the world. For $200 attendees can be judges and get loads of freebies. No Wil, Ziff Davis will not let you expense this trip.

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–IGN PC.com
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–CombatSim.com
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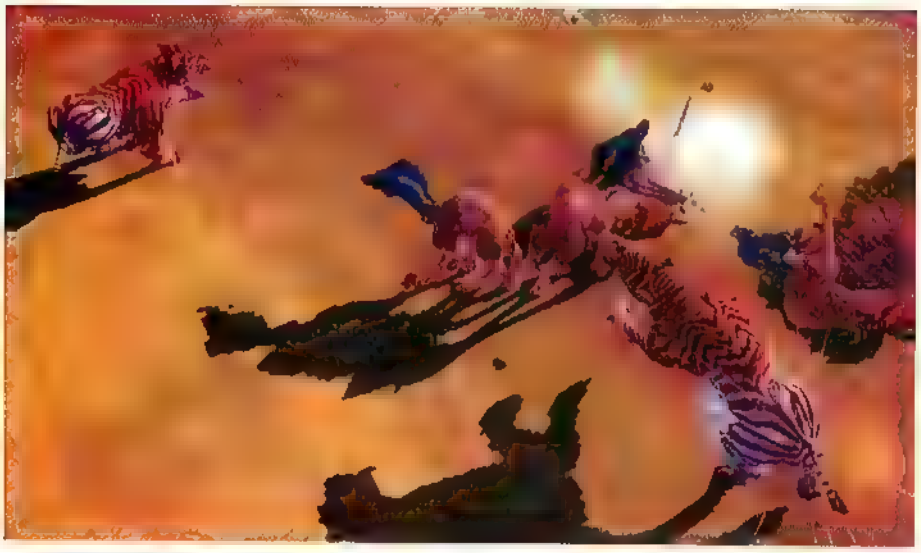


HANDS ON

When Animals Attack

Flying tigers fight tooth-and-nail with monkey-lizards in Microsoft's *Impossible Creatures* By Tom Price

Everyone has a little mad scientist in them. How else can you explain weird combinations like Taco Bell/Pizza Hut drive-throughs, Elvis Costello and Burt Bacharach, Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis, and Nuts & Gum (together at last!). But all of those mismatches pale in comparison with the freaks of nature you can create in *Impossible Creatures*.

Ever want to combine the speed of a cheetah with the jaws of a great white shark? How about mounting a huge scorpion stinger on an elephant? We've been tantalized by such possibilities since we first saw *Impossible Creatures*, née *Sigma*, a year ago. Call us crazy, but commanding hordes of gorill a-lobsters (globsters?) speaks to us on some primitive level.

We're happy to report that the game is looking darn good (despite its delay until 2003). The atmosphere evokes a cheesy 1930s adventure serial, right down to the Eskimos with Brooklyn accents. The game plays like a standard RTS, with a town square-style main building, which houses the laboratory, and various resource-collecting buildings. The main resources are coal, gas, and DNA, which your character Rex Chance must go out and collect.

Once Rex has collected some DNA and built a combiner unit, the fun begins. Designing your creatures is a kick, but it is also surprisingly deep. Animals have a whole host of stats associated with each body part. Noodl ng around to find just the right combination of legs, heads, tails, and other bits is quite a challenge, but it's already my favorite part of the game.

The one aspect of the game that concerns me is the combat. When the animals start fighting, they just kind of hack on each other and sparks fly off. Designer Alex Garden told us that Relic had to take out much of the unique fighting animations originally planned for the game in order to boost performance. Relic's design decisions can certa nly be trusted, but I would have opted for fewer animals and cooler effects.

Like any good RTS, *Impossible Creatures* features an involved single-player storyline along with sandbox mode and a robust mult.player, so there should be no shortage of gameplay. Of course, you might find that making elephant-scorpions and eagle-sharks is a game in itself.

The game evokes a 1930s adventure serial, right down to Eskimos with Brooklyn accents.

5, 10, 15 YEARS AGO IN CGW

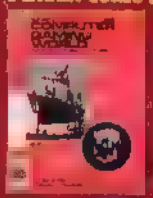
Five Years Ago, August 1997

"You can never be too good at rocket-jumping." True to her word, Stevie "KillCreek" Case rocket-jumped her way to fame and into our black, shriveled hearts—and John Romero's, too. Here we reported that KillCreek waxed her future beau in a best-of-three *Quake* tourney. Three years later, Eidos brought their love child, *Daikatana*, kicking and screaming into the world. But it was gamers who were left kicking and screaming over *Daikatana*.

Ten Years Ago, August 1992

Back then *CGW*'s publisher was trying to promote its fledgling *Kids & Computers* magazine with an ad depicting an 8-year-old girl playing a flight sim (because little girls love avionics systems). The cover blurbs struck a faintly sinister, mixed-message tone: "Is Low Frequency Radiation Endangering Your Child?" and "Choosing a Computer Camp." That's like *Travel + Leisure* touting "The Hideous Agony of Death by Ebola" with "10 Must-See Attractions in Gabon."

Fifteen Years Ago, August 1987



Long before the Internet fulfilled every geek's craving for digital smut, gamers had to settle for the erotic thrills of 16-color VGA graphics. Our story on the coming wave of adult games included the obvious products, *Leisure Suit Larry* and *Leather Goddesses of Phobos*, but we also felt compelled to point out that, in *Defender of the Crown*, "when the princess steps in front of that roaring fire, you see *everything* that is going on beneath her nightgown." OK, so we're creepy sometimes. Curiously absent from the article: *Mavis Beacon Teaches One-Handed Typing*.

intel

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pentium II

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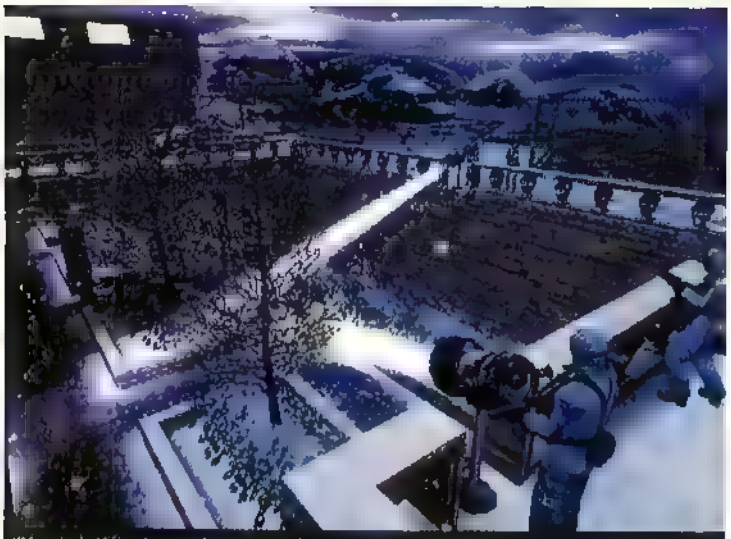


"Your mission, James, is to sneak into this castle, steal the terrorist's diabolical plans, and link up with a beautiful spy who will reveal herself to you."

BONDAGE

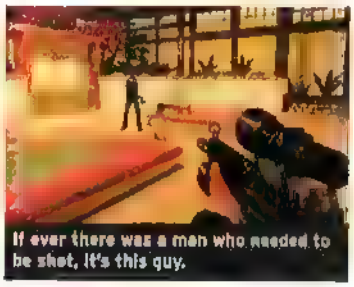
Nightfire

New 007 game makes it easier than ever for Bond to attempt rear entry **By Mark Asher and Ken Brown**

Bond is back—the man who breaks women's hearts as easily as he snaps men's necks—and his arrival on your PC will coincide with the 40th anniversary of his movie debut. *Nightfire*, EA's latest 007 shooter will be a multiplatform title based on an original story that borrows from much of the Bond legacy. You'll take 007 to more than 10 locales, including the Austrian Alps, outer space, and even underwater in the South Pacific as he battles the nefarious Rafael Drake, the head of an environmental organization secretly intent on world domination (oh, when tree-huggers go bad...). *Nightfire* will feature familiar villains and allies from the movies, as well as gadgets like watches that shoot laser beams and magnetic grips for scaling walls.

The PC version in development at Gearbox Software uses technology from both id and Valve Software. It features first-person levels, with some third-person sequences mixed in, that often let you choose between stealth or weapons.

In the mission we played, Bond has to infiltrate a castle during a party to steal some secret documents. You can shoot your way in, hide in a truck and be whisked in, or sneak around to a side door. Once inside, Bond displays his typical suave manner to blend in and then snoop around to find the documents. But things get hairy on the way out when a firefight erupts and Bond has to escape by gondola. When that Hind helicopter comes out of nowhere you'll be glad Bond packed a surface-to-air missile.



If ever there was a man who needed to be shot, it's this guy.

The PC version will also offer exclusive single player levels and multiplayer support. So dust off your tux and pour yourself a martini. *Nightfire* should be available at the end of the year, just in time for the new movie, *Die Another Day*.

***Nightfire* will feature familiar villains from the movies, as well as gadgets like watches that shoot laser beams.**

EXTENDED PLAY: HOMEBREW

By T. Byrl Baker

Designing Dungeons

Although the siege editor for *Dungeon Siege* is now available, don't let the flood of siege-lets make you overlook the many excellent mods out there. Most of these mods can be found at the *Dungeon Siege* Net Guide site (www.dsnetguide.com); their small size belies the dramatic impact they can have on the game.

eXpertAI
expertai2.tripod.com
You have to start a new game to enable this enhanced AI pack, but that's OK because you'll need a lot of experience to outwit these foes. No more inching up to trigger one monster and then whacking it when it's out of sight of its pals. Now if something sees you, it alerts everyone in the vicinity. They also use potions, regenerate health and mana, and will open up with long-range attacks from farther away. To help offset these changes, party AI has been beefed up, and player characters will now drink potions automatically, help each other out more often, and not wander off in pursuit of fleeing monsters.

Rom Overhaul
nivisec.com/ds
If you're sick of getting the same junk all the time, check out Nivisec and Aegrus' *Item Overhaul* mod. They've added 10,000 new prefixes and suffixes to spice up items, including 2,500 rares and 2,500 uniques. Several sets exist, each with its own special attributes and onscreen effects, and you can purchase magic rings and a limited number of rare items in shops once the mod is installed. Like *Diablo II* on steroids.

Advanced Archer Skills
www.dsnetguide.com
Let's face it: Archers in *DS* suck. Turn them into stronger characters with this archer skills mod, which gives archers new skills like six-arrow attacks, new arrow types, and enhanced abilities.

Watersoul's Mod Manager
www.dsnetguide.com/~wsoul
If you do download any mods or siege-lets for *DS*, make sure you nab the latest version of Watersoul's *Mod Manager* to handle them. The simple program provides a clean interface to enable and disable any *DS* add-ons installed on your computer, and it also comes with advanced options for launching the game.

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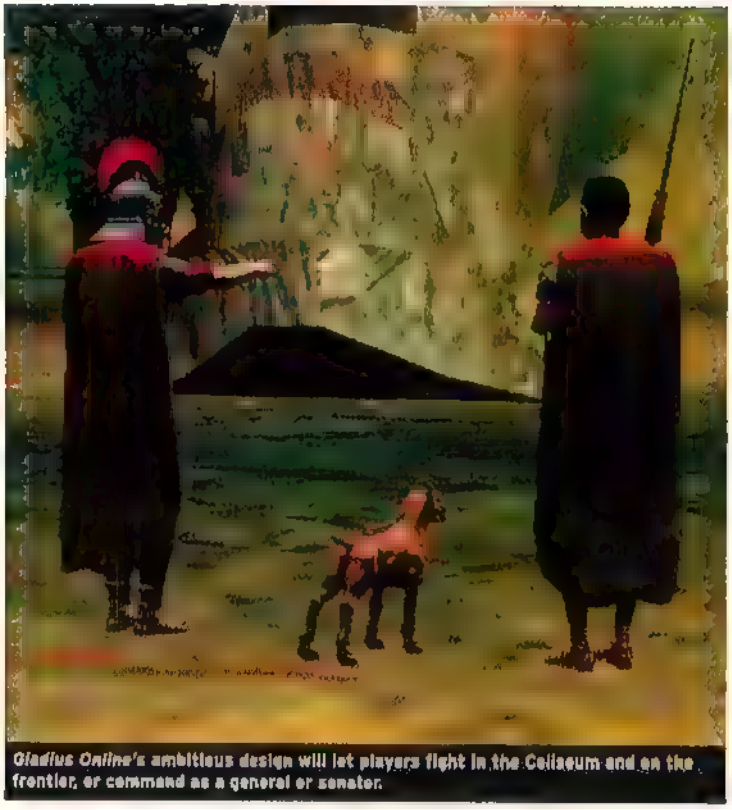


Gladius Online's ambitious design will let players fight in the Coliseum and on the frontier, or command as a general or senator.

FIRST LOOK

Maximus Painus Onlinus

Massively multiplayer *Gladius Online* will put a sword in your hand and a thong in your heart By John Houlihan

"People don't give a crap about ancient Rome." That was the studios' damning verdict on *Spartacus*, and even Ridley Scott had a hard time convincing Hollywood that a swords-and-sandals epic would work. But that all changed when *Gladiator* kicked major ass on the silver screen, introducing a new generation to the exploits of large, sweaty men with big daggers.

It was only a matter of time before someone decided gladiators were the right subject for a computer game. But *Gladius Online* takes the concept further by going massively multiplayer. Billed as a true historical virtual world, it is being built by veteran programmers from *EverQuest*, *Meridian 59*, and early text-based MUDs. It's 180 A.D. and across a domain that stretches from Northern Europe to North Africa, Rome is weakening under the tyranny of Emperor Commodus. Meanwhile, barbarians are massing on the borders. The empire has never looked so vulnerable.

You will be born into *Gladius* as a slave or free barbarian, either of which can become a gladiator. Initially under the tutelage of a master, you advance by completing quests generated by dynamic career sniffing routines. Maxing your level to become a citizen of Rome will signal the beginning of a new ballgame. You will then be able to build and manage new game areas, may get invited to become a general, governor, or senator; and can generate storylines and generally help to run the virtual Roman world.

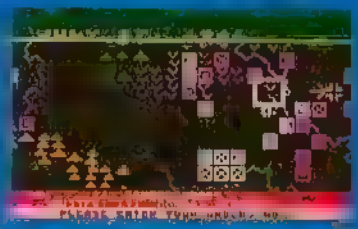
The goal of developer Redoedum is to create not only a game, but also a community. The company's message boards are already humming with ideas from fans eager to clash swords in the Coliseum, race chariots at the Circus Maximus, and fight barbarians on the fringes of the empire. For now all we can do is wait—even a virtual Rome can't be built in a day.

PERSPECTIVE: POST-MORTEM

By Kevin Carey

Eastern Front 1941

One of the most amazing games I ever played came in 1981 from the Atari Program Exchange. It was amazing because it showed that a computer wargame could be as accessible as a 2D platformer, yet go far beyond anything the genre had offered before. There was an orders phase in which you and the computer plotted your orders and an execution phase in which the units tried to carry these orders out. The interface was the smoothest I've ever seen in this kind of game: You used the Atari joystick and an occasional tap of the spacebar to clear orders. Your plotted moves were displayed onscreen. When you were done, you hit the Start button and the battle began. Despite having a very simple combat system (units were rated for Muster, which reflected their manpower, and Strength, which related this manpower to combat readiness), the results were quite realistic. Turns were weekly. The game was *Eastern Front 1941*.



Twelve years later, SSI released *Gary Grigsby's War in Russia*. In the intervening years, action gaming had gone from *Castle Wolfenstein* to *Doom*. But what was SSI's massive treatment of the greatest land war ever fought? Essentially an *Eastern Front* remake. You still plotted your orders. Units still had Muster and Strength, although the game was dressed up with details like the ability to track individual tank types. Turns were still weekly. But where *Eastern Front 1941* had offered something new and exciting, more than a decade of thought had produced no fresh ideas.

Five years after *War in Russia*, TalonSoft released *Herm Kager's The Operational Art of War*. Supposedly the ultimate operational-level wargaming system, *TOAW* was really a quantitative combat model disguised as a game. It didn't ship with any Barbarossa scenarios, but had it done so it would have shown that the most ambitious wargame designed to that date was incapable of simulating the most famous mobile campaign of encirclement ever. Some progress.

In a 1982 article in *Creative Computing* magazine, *Eastern Front* programmer Chris Crawford wrote that he had originally planned to cover the entire campaign in Russia from 1941-1945, but settled on depicting the initial campaign through early 1942, which "reduced the projected playing time from a ridiculous 12 hours to a reasonable 3 hours." That's an incredible statement considering how computer wargame design has developed since then. You can spend 12 hours just reading the rules for *TOAW*. Yet if you were to line the three games up and play out the invasion of Russia from June 1941 to March 1942, the game that would give you the most accurate outcome would be the one designed almost 20 years ago, to fit into 16K of RAM. That's a sobering thought.

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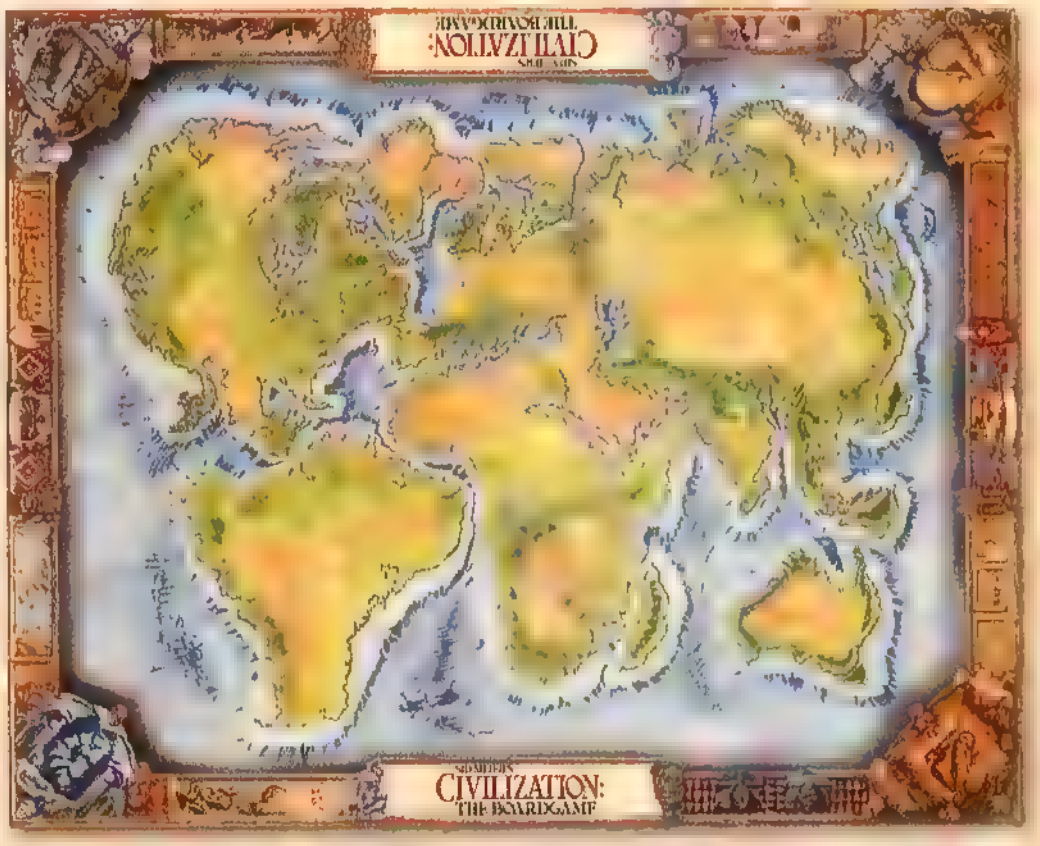

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COMPUSA hastings Wizard

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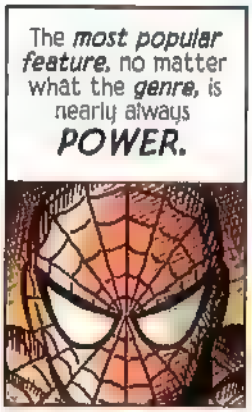
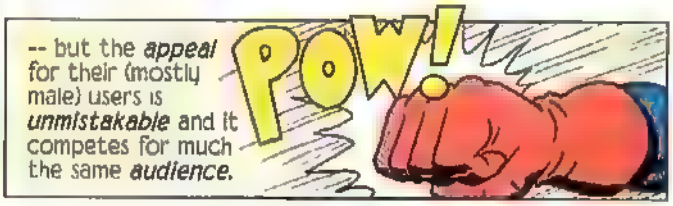
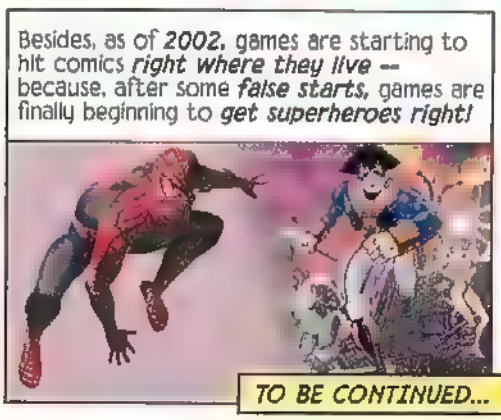
DISCOVERINGGAMES



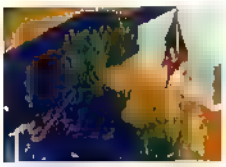




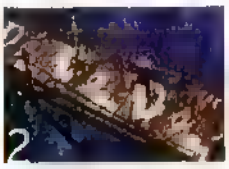
RANKINGS

CGW Top 20

Dungeon Siege hacks its way into *Sims* territory



The Sims don't seem to want to return from their *Vacation*.



Microsoft seizes gold with *Dungeon Siege*.

The Sims: Best-selling PC game of all time. Was there ever any doubt?

Rank	Last Month	Game	Rating
1	1	**The Sims: Vacation** ($29, Electronic Arts)	★★★★☆
2	8	**Dungeon Siege** ($42, Microsoft)	★★★★½
3	2	**The Sims** ($42, Electronic Arts)	★★★★★
4	4	**Star Wars Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast** ($47, LucasArts)	★★★★★
5	-	**Medal of Honor Allied Assault** ($45, Electronic Arts)	★★★★½
6	5	**The Sims: Hot Date** ($28, Electronic Arts)	★★★★½
7	6	**Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone** ($28, Electronic Arts)	★★★½☆
8	10	**The Sims: Livin' Large** ($28, Electronic Arts)	★★★★½
9	13	**Heroes of Might and Magic IV** ($43, 3DO)	★★½☆☆
10	9	**RollerCoaster Tycoon** ($21, Infogrames)	★★★★☆
11		**The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind** ($49, Bethesda)	★★★★½
12	12	**Starcraft: Battlechest** ($21, Vivendi Universal)	NR
13	11	**Microsoft Zoo Tycoon** ($27, Microsoft)	★★★½☆
14	-	**Freedom Force** ($39, Electronic Arts and Crave)	★★★★★
15	16	**Diablo II: Lord of Destruction** ($31, Vivendi Universal)	★★★★½
16	14	**The Sims: House Party** ($29, Electronic Arts)	★★★★½
17	19	**Sim Theme Park** ($17, Electronic Arts)	★★★★½
18		**Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Desert Siege** ($20, Ubi Soft)	★★★★½
19	18	**Civilization III** ($47, Infogrames)	★★★★★
20	-	**Age of Empires II: Age of Kings** ($30, Microsoft)	★★★★★

JANUARY RETAIL SALES RESULTS BY NPD INTELECT

NOTABLE QUOTE

"*Doom III* is pushing the fear factor over the raw action. The monsters are going to be much more independently fearsome, rather than just acting as moving gun turrets." -John Carmack

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GAME	PUBLISHER	RELEASE DATE
Anarchy Online Special Edition	Funcom	6/5/02
Gore	DreamCatcher Interactive	6/11/02
F1 2002	Electronic Arts	6/13/02
Sniper	Infogrames	6/14/02
Age of Wonders II: The Wizard's Throne	GodGames	6/14/02
Neverwinter Nights	Infogrames	6/20/02
MechWarrior 4 Mech Pak: Inner Sphere	Microsoft	6/21/02
Delta Force: Task Force Dagger	Electronic Arts	6/27/02
Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos	Blizzard Entertainment	6/28/02
WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos Collector's Edition	Blizzard Entertainment	7/3/02
Icewind Dale II	Interplay	7/3/02
Icewind Dale II with Adventure Pack	Interplay	7/3/02
Dragon's Lair 3D	Ubi Soft	7/15/02
Unreal Tournament 2003	Infogrames	7/30/02
Counterstrike: Condition Zero	Sierra	8/14/02
TaylorMade Golf	Infogrames	8/17/02
Battlefield 1942	Electronic Arts	9/4/02
Rayman Arena	Ubi Soft	9/15/02
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Midway	9/15/02
Unreal II	Infogrames	9/17/02
Everquest: Planes of Power	Sony	10/1/02

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Our latest guesses about when these games are finally shipping By Rich LaPorte

Release dates are notorious for slipping. New gamers seem to put a lot of stock in the given dates, but after you've followed release dates long enough, you'll know that they're about as firm as sand on the San Andreas fault.

The good news this month is that *Dragon's Lair 3D* is back in development. Ubi Soft picked up this Dragonstone title for the PC. Perhaps taking a cue from Lara, hero Dirk the Daring will reportedly have more than 150 new animations, allowing him to run, jump, roll, sneak, climb, crouch, crawl, swing, push, lift, and somersault on your PC this fall.

Deus Ex 2 looked fantastic at this year's E3. The game is now running off of Ion Storm's own proprietary technology—the development team decided to ditch the Unreal Warfare engine. Thanks to a new lead artist and the quantum leap in polygon-pushing power, the graphics have taken on an extremely dark, stylized motif—drawing from both film noir and comics. The demo we saw showed off the game's impressive physics and realistic light-sourcing that casts dramatic real-time shadows on the environment. Gameplay and story details are still sparse. It is currently slated for release sometime in 2003.

Keep an eye on a good-looking 4X title recently announced called *Haegemonia*. Developed by Terminal Reality (*Imperium Galactica*), the game promises great strategic and tactical gameplay. Unlike its predecessors, *Haegemonia* will require little planet micromanagement, focusing on planetary defenses, fleet management, production capacity, and of course research. We hope to see it by the end of the year.

1503 A.D. The New World	EA	08/16/02
Age of Mythology	Microsoft	09/04/02
Age of Wonders II	GOD Games	06/12/02
Aliens vs. Predator 2: Primal Hunt	Sierra	Q3 2002
Asheron's Call II	Microsoft	Q4 2002
Battlefield 1942	EA	09/17/02
Beneforce	Okumi	Q2 2003
Call of Cthulhu	FishTank	08/15/02
City of Heroes	NCsoft	Q3 2002
Civilization III: Play the World	Infogrames	TBA
Combat Flight Simulator 3	Microsoft	Q3 2002
Combat Mission 2: Barbarossa to Berlin	Big Time	Q3 2002
Command & Conquer: Generals	EA	Q4 2002
Conflict: Desert Storm	SCI	Q4 2002
Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	Sierra	08/15/02
Delta Force: Task Force	NovaLogic	06/26/02
Deus Ex 2	Eidos	Q1 2003
Doom III	Activision	TBA
Dragon's Lair 3D	Ubi Soft	Q3 2002
Duke Nukem Forever	GOD Games	2022
Earth and Beyond	EA	Q2 2002
EverQuest: The Planes of Power	Sony	TBA
EverQuest II	Sony	Q3 2003
Final Fantasy XI	SquareSoft	TBA
Freelancer	Microsoft	Q3 2002
G.I. Combat	Strategy First	08/05/02
Gore	DreamCatcher	08/05/02
Gothic II	JoWood	Q4 2002

Grand Prix 4	Infogrames	08/27/02
Haegemonia	DreamCatcher	Q4 2002
Halo	Microsoft	Unknown
Harpoon 4	Ubi Soft	Q2 2002
Hidden & Dangerous 2	TakeTwoInteractive	10/15/02
Hitman 2	Eidos	09/16/02
Homeworld 2	Sierra	TBA
Icewind Dale II	Interplay	07/03/02
IGI2: Covert Strike	Codemasters	08/12/02
Imperium Galactica III	CDV	Q3 2002
Impossible Creatures	Microsoft	08/06/02
Indiana Jones	LucasArts	Q3 2002
Industry Giant II	JoWood	09/05/02
James Bond 007: NightFire	EA	Q4 2002
Links 2003	Microsoft	Q3 2002
Lock On	Ubi Soft	Q4 2002
Lords of the Realm III	Sierra	TBA
Madden NFL 2003	EA Sports	Q3 2002
Mafia	TakeTwoInteractive	09/05/02
Master of Orion III	Microprose	09/04/02
MechWarrior 4: Clan	Microsoft	07/26/02
MechWarrior 4: Inner Sphere	Microsoft	Q2 2002
Medieval: Total War	EA	09/04/02
NBA Live	EA Sports	Q3 2002
Nocturne	NovaLogic	CANCELED
Neverwinter Nights	Infogrames	06/12/02
No One Lives Forever 2	Fox Interactive	TBA
O.R.B.	Strategy First	08/30/02
Operation Flashpoint: Resistance	Codemasters	06/26/02
PlanetSide	Sony	Q4 2002
Posteritatis	Eidos	Q3 2002

Prisoner of War	Codemasters	09/04/02
Pro Rucer Driver	Codemasters	08/16/02
Project Nomads	CDV	Q3 2002
Quake IV	Activision	Unknown
Rainbow Six: Raven Shield	Ubi Soft	Q3 2002
Republic: The Revolution	Eidos	Q2 2002
Rollercoaster Tycoon 2	Infogrames	Q3 2002
Shadowbane	Ubi Soft	Q2 2002
SimCity 4	EA	Q4 2002
Sims Online	EA	Q3 2002
Sovereign	Sony	Q2 2002
Star Trek: Starfleet Command III	Activision	Q4 2002
Star Trek: Elite Force II	Ritual Entertainment	Q1 2003
Star Wars Galaxies	LucasArts	Q4 2002
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	Q3 2003
Sudden Strike 2	CDV	08/30/02
SWAT: Urban Justice	Sierra	09/10/02
Team Fortress 2	Sierra	TBA
The Thing	Universal Interactive	08/14/02
Thief III	Eidos	Q4 2002
Tron 2.0	Monolith	TBA
Unreal II	Infogrames	Q1 2003
Unreal Tournament 2003	Infogrames	07/24/02
WarBirds 3	Simon/Schuster	09/03/02
WarCraft III	Blizzard	06/28/02
Warlords IV	SSG	Q3 2002
World of WarCraft	Blizzard	Unknown
World War II	Codemasters	Q3 2002

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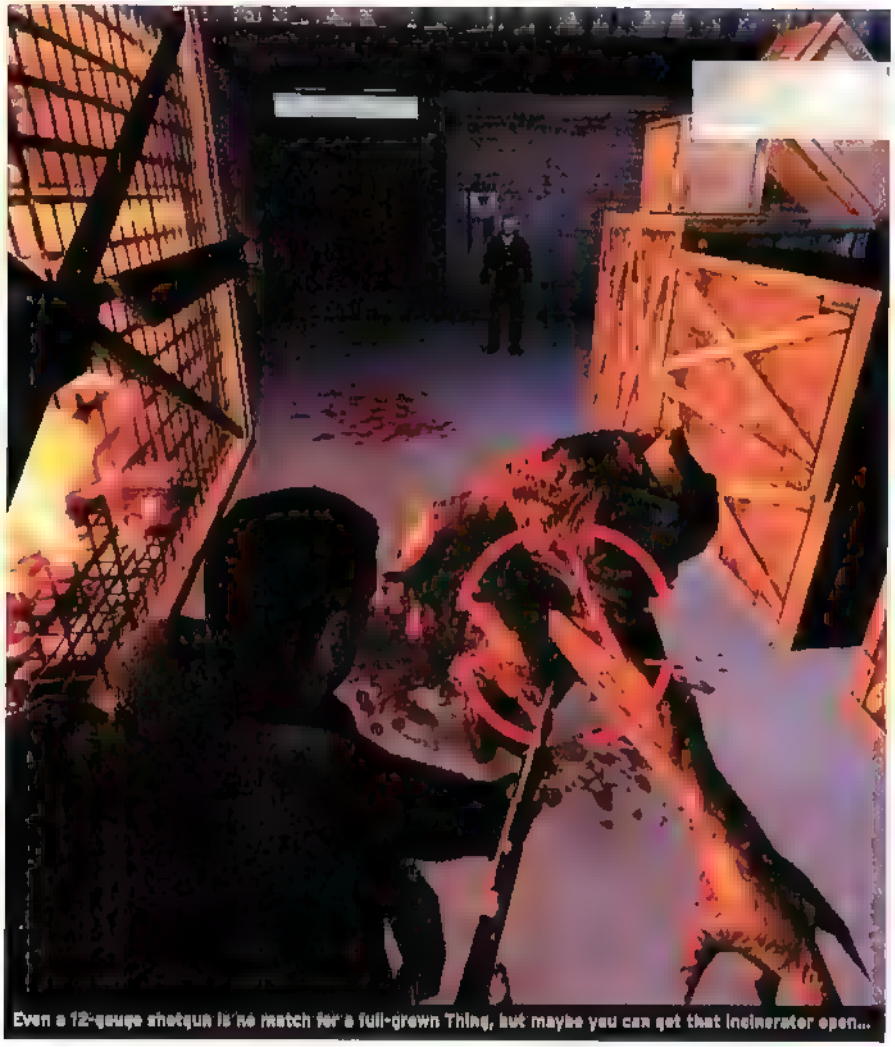
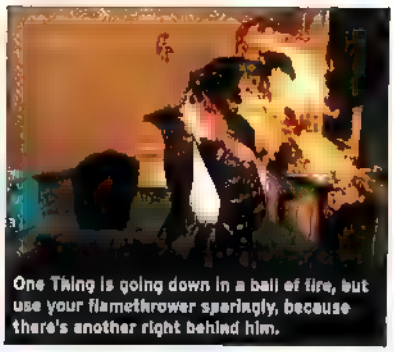
EVERYONE

E

Animated Violence


Even a 12-gauge shotgun is no match for a full-grown Thing, but maybe you can get that incinerator open...


One Thing is going down in a ball of fire, but use your flamethrower sparingly, because there's another right behind him.

I'd like my Thing medium-rare please.

HANDS ON

Oh No! It's...The Thing

Give my regards to Ebola—*The Thing* will eat you like chopped liver By John Marrin

Don't forget: Anyone could have a Thing inside.

There are many things that can kill you in tropical climates: poisonous snakes, insects, crocodiles, malaria, and perhaps even the occasional pool of quicksand. But in the Antarctic, aside from hungry polar bears and the cold, you're home free...well, except for *The Thing*.

The Thing opens in the aftermath of the ending to John Carpenter's classic movie of the same name. An Antarctic research facility lies in ruins. You command a special-operations team charged with finding out what the hell happened and rescuing any survivors.

For those who don't know, the "Thing" in *The Thing* is an alien life-form that can take over a host body in a way similar to that of a virus. This makes it difficult to tell just who's on your side—you find out who's not when their bodies rip open and they morph into irritated, toothy creatures.

The game is played from either first or third person. You control members of your team via a simple menu that lets you order them to stay, follow, trade items, or go to a specific area. NPCs like medics and engineers can heal you or hotwire anything from a car to a computer. You start out with three team members, but you'll meet more characters who can help you. Just don't forget: Anyone could have a Thing inside.

It's an action game, but *The Thing* has a good amount of puzzle solving that essentially requires finding keys, restoring power, and the like in order to gain access to new areas of the base. Meanwhile, you have plenty of opportunities to wax aliens with weapons including an MP5 submachine gun, sniper rifle, grenades, shotgun, and more.

Fully developed Things are almost immune to your weapons, so you have to be resourceful. They roast up nicely with the flamethrower, but fuel is very limited, so you'll have to manage your NPCs well to trap or kill Things.

Developer Computer Artworks has given the game with a look and pace that does a good job of emulating the haunting feeling of Carpenter's movie. Fans of action-horror games like *Resident Evil* will want to shake their groove *Thing* this fall.

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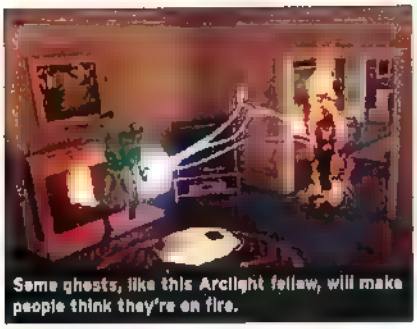
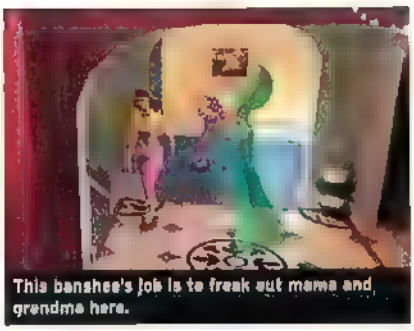
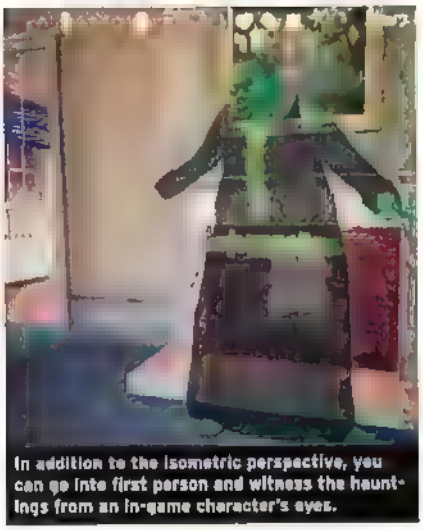


Some ghosts, like this Arclight fellow, will make people think they're on fire.



This banshee's job is to freak out mama and grandma here.



In addition to the isometric perspective, you can go into first person and witness the hauntings from an in-game character's eyes.

UPCOMING

Ghost Master

Who they gonna call? Not you **By Thierry Nguyen**

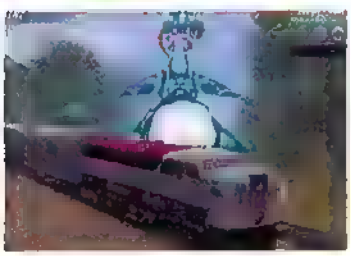
Somewhere out there, a mad Englishman must have played *The Sims* and mused, "Hmm, if only I could control a bunch of ghosts instead of people!" The result? *Ghost Master*, a ghost-managing game in which you haunt different places. Instead of trying to impress Bella Goth, you want to scare the living bejesus out of her.

You're dropped into a variety of levels (train, cruise liner, house, the Old West) where you try to fulfill objectives like putting a ghost to rest, solving a whodunit, or scaring frat boys out of the house. You're assisted by a retinue of ghosts powered by plasm, which you earn by scaring people.

Plasm is used to customize a ghost's abilities and bind that ghost to a particular location. Ghosts range from gremlins who muck things up to banshees who shriek at your victims. When they're bound, they can start scaring people away, drumming up more plasm for you to haunt with. Be careful, though, as your opposition includes other ghosts, paranormal investigators, and even the GhostBreakers.

The very concept of a game in which you control ghosts and try to psychologically scar people is enough to pique our interest. *Ghost Master* will be haunting shelves by the holidays.

Instead of trying to impress Bella Goth, you want to scare the living bejesus out of her.



FREEWARE

Free 3D Dev Tools

Create your own 3D animation or mod content with Discreet's Gmax By James Mielke

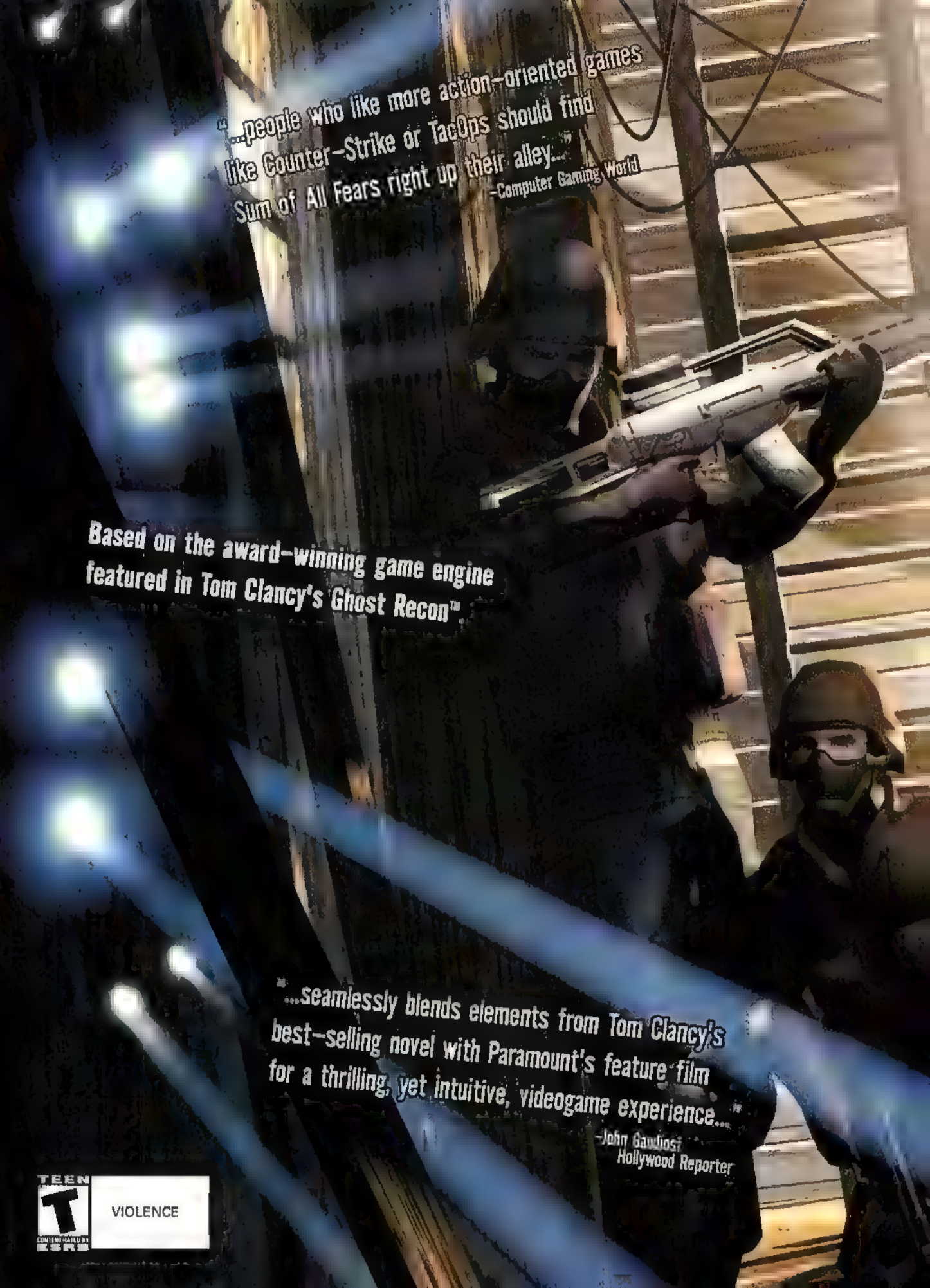
It wasn't too long ago that people needed customized SGI workstations, some Freon, and a few thousand hours to render objects in 3D. 3D Studio Max changed all that by putting powerful 3D modeling in the hands of the budget-conscious artist.

But if you're just getting started and want a 3D rendering program that doesn't cost you anything, Gmax is for you. Developed by Discreet (the makers of 3DSMax), the free program lets users create 3D models, textures, lighting, and animations. Gmax can work in tandem with 3D Studio Max to create a full-featured game development environment, but it can also be used by itself to create portfolio pieces or samples of games or animation—good if you're looking for a job in these fields.

The program will also appeal to mod makers, as they can create content for games developed with 3D Studio Max. Discreet's Paul Perreault says, "Gmax is a very unique product because it allows game developers and publishers to create mods based on a powerful 3D tool platform—and thereby extend the shelf life of their game or game franchise."

With more than 175,000 registered users, Discreet's Max-compatible dev tool seems to be catching on. "Gmax allows game players the unprecedented ability to download and use a free, fully capable, professional-grade, 3D content creation tool to create and edit game content," Perreault adds.

Gmax is limited in its file format support, however. So if you want to make games, you'll eventually need 3DSMax, which runs about $3,000.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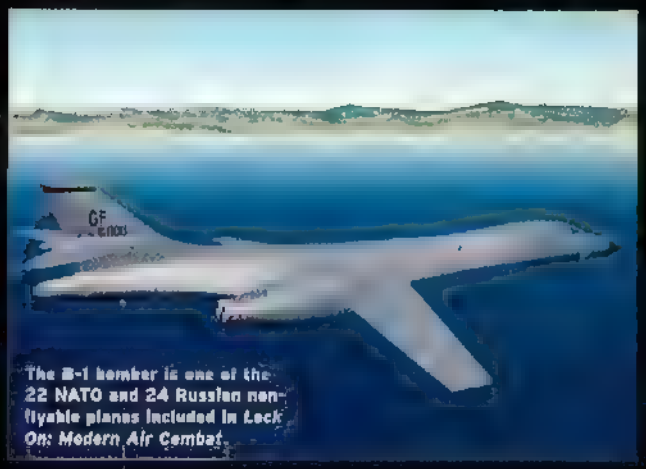
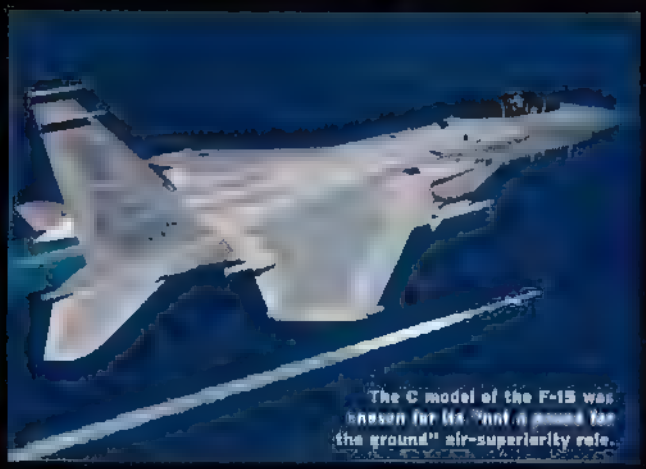


The B-1 bomber is one of the 22 NATO and 24 Russian non-flyable planes included in *Lock On: Modern Air Combat*.



The C model of the F-15 was known for its "nail it pound for the ground" air-superiority role.

LOCK ON: MODE

East meets West in a sim that aims to appeal to novices and veterans

RN AIR COMBAT

By Jeff Lackey

The rules say that flight combat sims come in two flavors: "lite" and "study." The former feature a wide variety of planes and simple controls and avionics (think *USAF*); the latter feature fewer planes and revel in their detail and accuracy (think *Falcon 4.0*). The creators of *Lock On: Modern Air Combat* are trying to break out of that mold by designing a sim that offers truly scalable gameplay. Novices who want a simple flight sim that they can jump into can opt for easy radar, simplified flight dynamics, easy-to-defeat enemies, labels for enemy and friendly units, and an enhanced cockpit warning system. On the other hand, hardcore flight sim buffs can turn off all of these options and enjoy incredibly accurate flight dynamics for each aircraft, detailed weapons and avionics systems, and smart AI that can make experts sweat.

A combat flight sim that appeals to all levels of virtual pilots? That's quite a challenge, but this isn't the first sim for the *Lock On* team. Executive producer Carl Norman and Russian development team Eagle Dynamics produced the *Flanker* series of serious simulations that developed a cult following among hardcore sim fanatics. Serving as producer is Matt Wagner, a designer for *Jane's F/A-18*, another critically acclaimed study sim. They have three primary goals for *Lock On*. First, a broad scope: Rather than focus on a single plane, players will be able to fly detailed aircraft from both the West and the East. The list of flyable planes includes air-to-air as well as air-to-ground models: MIG-29 (three variants), Su-27 Flanker B, Su-25 Frogfoot, Su-33 Flanker D, Su-39 Frogfoot, F-15C Eagle, and—the aircraft for which simmers have been pleading for years—the beautifully ugly A-10A Thunderbolt II (better known as the Warthog).

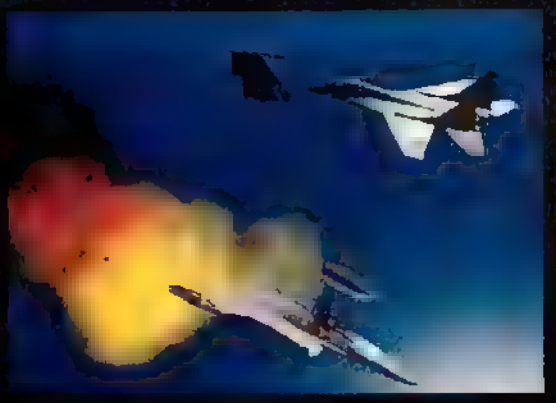
The second goal for *Lock On* is an immersive environment. Players will be able to create pilots for the USA and Russia, and all pilots will have stats recorded throughout their careers. *Lock On*'s action takes place in the Black Sea region, with ground textures detailed down to 3 centimeters, large forests, mountains, open bodies of water, and accurate 3D terrain. Also included will be an accurate and functional road and rail system. All towns, cities, ports, and airfields will be geographically correct. Even at the prerelease stage, the plane and terrain graphics are jaw-dropping gorgeous. The developers have put in impressive audio effects, from the sounds of engines and weapons to an assortment of radio communications from wingmen, AWACS, tower controllers, and refuelers. (You can refuel by hooking up to either the KC-10 or IL-78.)

The third goal is scalable gameplay. The hardcore crowd should appreciate features such as detailed avionics for the F-15C and A-10A, which were obtained from unclassified manuals, and high-level interactions with wingmen and AWACS that include vectoring wingmen to various locations and controlling wingman sensors and countermeasure systems; these interactions also feature a variety of intercept tactics. The flight physics expand on the superb physics of the *Flanker* series.

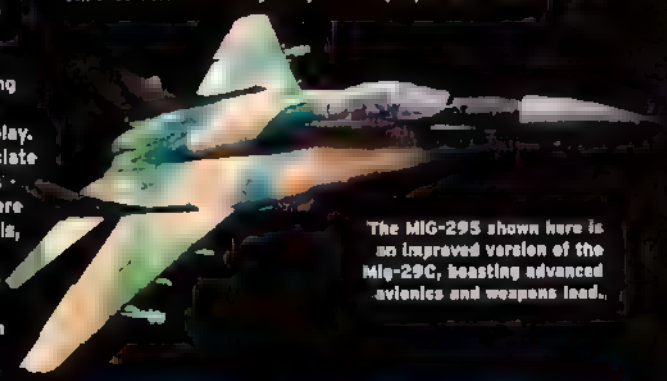
This could be the sim that offers truly scalable gameplay.

Novices will appreciate the ability to use simplified "super-radar" and other features that can be toggled on and off. Both novices and veterans will benefit from an extensive series of training missions in which the instructor advises the player by demonstrating a particular skill and then hands the controls over to the player.

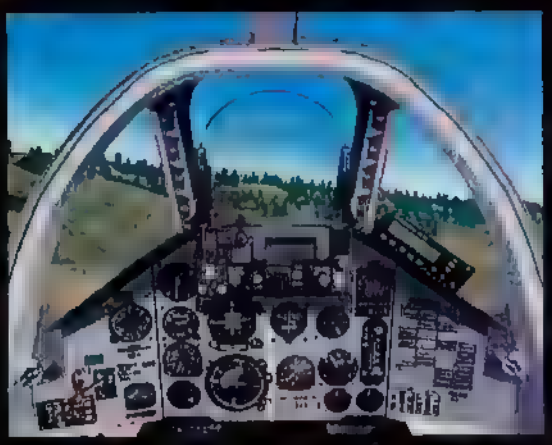
Flight sims that appeal to both serious simmers and newbies are as rare as sophisticated Tom Green fans, but *Lock On: Modern Air Combat* appears to have an excellent chance of achieving that lofty goal. Prospective fighter jocks will be able to judge for themselves in fall 2002.



An F-16 Falcon waves goodbye to his prey (a MIG-29).



The MIG-29S shown here is an improved version of the Mig-29C, boasting advanced avionics and weapons load.

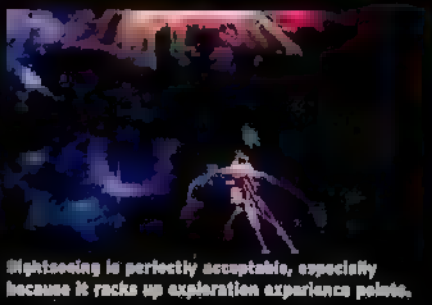


The cockpit of the Su-25 Frogfoot.

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: Ubi Soft Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Eagle Dynamics
URL: www.lo-mac.com
RELEASE DATE: Fall 2002

A Jenquai fig
warping his way to Paren's



Sightseeing is perfectly acceptable, especially because it racks up exploration experience points.

EARTH AND BE

CGW editors give their first impressions in a massively multiplayer preview By Robe

Jeff Green

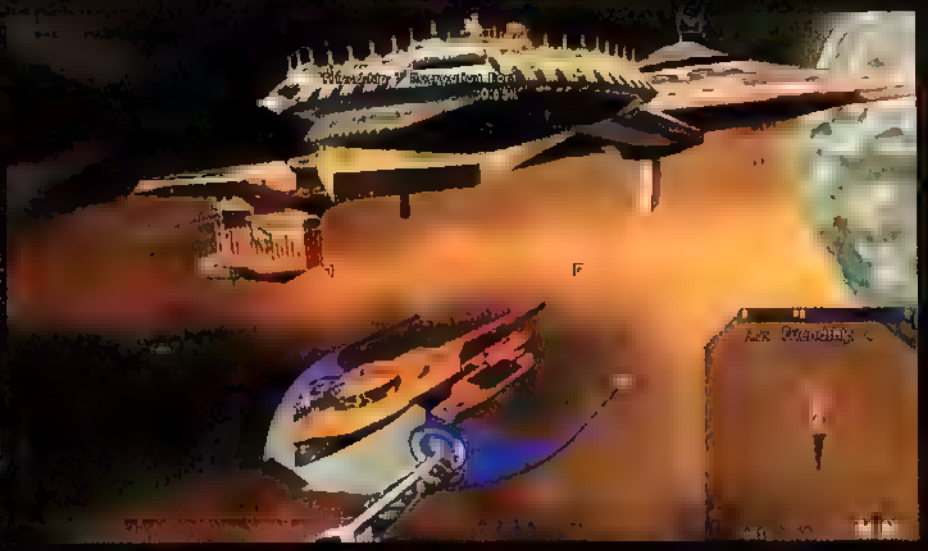
I'm a big MMORPG fan, but I tend to gravitate toward games with elves. Outer space scares me. So I was happy to discover that this game really is an RPG and not a space sim. Getting to indulge in space battles without having to be coordinated with a joystick is a major plus for me. I'm playing a warrior because I figured it would be the easiest to comprehend, and so far my character is holding up nicely and has some interesting skills like Fold Space, which lets you bolt away if a battle is going badly. I'm impressed by the quest interface, which not only keeps track of what I'm supposed to be doing but also tells me the order in which I'm supposed to do things. I'm still a newbie here, but my first impression is favorable. The game looks great and is easy to get into. I would not have thought this game was for me, but I plan to stick with it.

Tom Price

I think this is the first MMORPG I've ever played, and I can see why people get hooked on them. It's like that antidrug ad from the '80s: "I do more coke, so I can work longer hours, so I can make more money, so I can do more coke..." I'll take more missions, so I can make more credits, so I can buy bigger engines, so I can take more missions. I'm hooked into this vicious cycle already and having a darn good time. The game is gorgeous, with breathtaking spacescapes and exotic planetside locales. I like the look of the characters and ships, and the level of customization for them is great. I don't like the control system much—I know this isn't a turn-and-burn sim, but a joystick would work much better in dogfights than the default mouse and hotkeys configuration. Doesn't matter—I'll still probably waste a few dozen hours of my life on this game.

Scooter

It's nice to finally get *Privateer Online*. In MMORPGs I'm usually one of those dorks who plays a support class rather than a combat class, so I went for the Explorer class. It's cool to get experience just for exploring systems I haven't been to. Also, I'm having fun mining asteroids for rare minerals and crap in addition to fighting drones and space critters. The atmosphere makes for great visuals and interesting enemies—you get space pirates, slug things, jellyfish, and other slimy critters. I've played only the first few levels, and I'm hoping the rest of the game will be just as interesting.

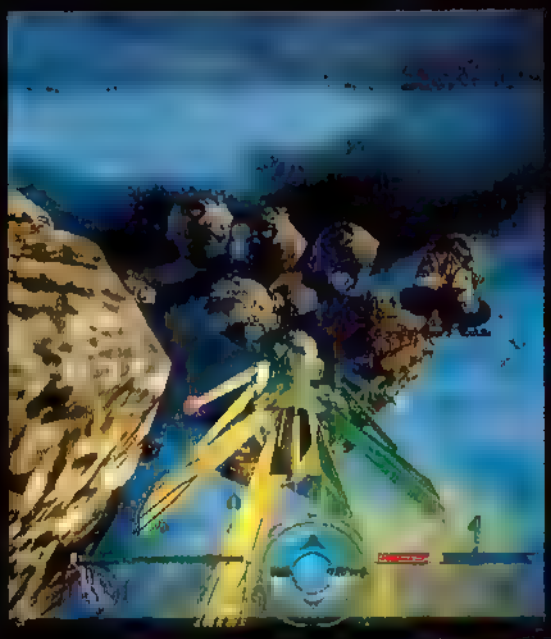


Space stations provide a place to trade goods, find work, manufacture items, and save in-game progress.

Robert Coffey

I opted to play the Jenquai Explorer because I wanted to see if Westwood could make flying around in space rewarding as a playing experience. So far I've been impressed. I've spent a lot of time jetting to different waypoints and such in the galaxy. The big experience payoffs have come in the tensest moments, such as when I had to cloak my vessel and slowly crawl into a beacon to scan it so that the killer aliens around the beacon wouldn't spot me and kill me. Explorers are a weak class, so I can't fight my way out of tough spots, and I have to run for it a lot. But in *Earth and Beyond* I'm enjoying some narrow escapes and close calls while still improving my character and abilities—a nice change from other MMORPGs that don't let you level up unless you kill. The major changes in appearance seem to come at various big-level plateaus, but I'd like to see more options for tinkering with your ship and character between those milestones.

Docking lets you exit the ship and wander around on foot.



You can even relegate yourself to a life of space mining.

YOND

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: EA
DEVELOPER: Westwood Studios
URL: www.westwood.com
RELEASE DATE: Q3 2002

Coffey, Jeff Green, Thierry Nguyen, and Tom Price

NEVER WINTER NIGHTS

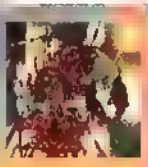
STORY BY
ELLIOTT CHIN

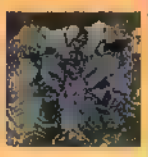
ILLUSTRATION BY
MICHAEL SASS

EXCLUSIVE FEATURE

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS FREEPS TO COMPLETION

Three years ago, BioWare promised the world *Neverwinter Nights*. While its competitors raced to create the next big MMO game, BioWare instead sought to bring the essence of *Dungeons & Dragons* to the desktop. *Neverwinter Nights* would revolutionize the RPG by letting players create modules using authentic third-edition *D&D* rules, post the modules online for anyone to play, and—here was the best part—let you run those modules for other players as Dungeon Master, so you could control every aspect of the adventure and thereby create a better adventure than any AI-driven game ever could. True *D&D*, with the camaraderie of





NEVER WINTER NIGHTS

a table game and the power of a real-time DM, would come to the PC thanks to *Neverwinter Nights*.

Now, with the release of *Neverwinter Nights* imminent and three years of work nearly wrapped up, is the game finally all that it promised to be? Not exactly, but the result, although slightly different from the original vision, is still vintage BioWare and looks to be every bit the worthy successor to *Baldur's Gate I* and *II*. *CGW* got an advance, prefinal copy of *Neverwinter Nights*. Bugs are still being squashed and code diligently optimized, but we were able to play through the game in order to bring you this thorough preview.

SUMMONED CREATURES like this tiger can ease the burden placed on the single-character party in *Neverwinter Nights*. You'll need such cohorts around to compensate for your weaknesses.

A WORTHY SINGLE-PLAYER GAME

The *Neverwinter Nights* toolset, called Aurora, is no longer the main emphasis, having taken a backseat to the single-player game, which wasn't talked up much when the game first surfaced but has since come to the forefront in ads and marketing. BioWare will tell you that it had plans for a big solo campaign from the start, but in the early days, *Neverwinter* was about its DM tools and online play, not its single-player campaign.

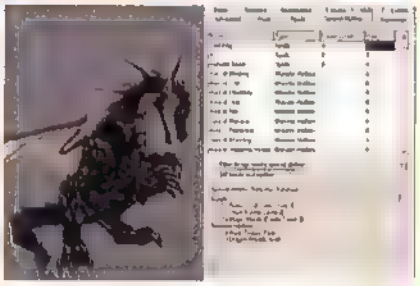
But as the ship date got closer, the focus shifted to the single-player experience, and that experience is now top notch. While the tools and multiplayer are still good, they won't put Wizards of the Coast out of work, as some feared when the ambitious blueprint for *Neverwinter* first surfaced. This game, like *Baldur's Gate*, is about the single-player campaign, and it will thrive or not based on that experience, so let's take a look.

Neverwinter Nights is huge, another time-consuming epic. The main quests that propel you through the storyline are extensive, and even if those were all you pursued, to the exclusion of all side quests, the game would take you perhaps 60 hours to complete. The first chapter alone sends you on a good 20-hour goose hunt. If you factor in the numerous side quests that pop up in every chapter, you could spend well over 120 hours on the game.

AN OGRE MAGE and his cultist ally are about to feel the heat from a divine Flamestrike spell.

AURORA TOOLSET

The *Neverwinter Nights* toolset, Aurora, lets you create modules, which are full-blown multiplayer adventures that you can share with your friends and post online. Its complex interface is off-putting, but it is undeniably powerful—it was used by BioWare to create the *Neverwinter Nights* single-player campaign. You can open the module for each chapter in the campaign and follow BioWare's design or follow the tutorial upon first booting up the toolset to build your own modest modules.



BioWare has done what it can to make Aurora easy to use, but it is still overwhelming. The tutorial in the prefinal code is minimal at best, so we're hoping a true one makes it into the final release.

Those who wish to fully utilize Aurora will have to study the documentation, constantly turn to BioWare's online help, and spend hours learning the tools, interface, and language.

ENTER THE WAILING DEATH

The single-player campaign features a prelude and four full chapters. We noticed right away that *Neverwinter* doesn't start on the same dramatic note that *Baldur's Gate* did. In *BG*, you were the son of the dead god Bhaal, and you were fighting to prevent your evil sibling from resurrecting the fallen deity. In contrast, *Neverwinter*'s plot isn't exactly earth-shattering. You begin as a local adventurer in the northern city of Neverwinter. A withering plague called the Wailing Death has gripped the city; the local authorities, led by the beautiful Elfin paladin Aribeth, are on the cusp of a

THE PALADIN Aribeth has charged you with saving Neverwinter. She is but one of many interesting NPCs you'll meet.

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NEVER WINTER NIGHTS

cure when disaster strikes. Foul forces that seek to prolong the plague for their own nefarious purposes have captured the four creatures needed to brew the cure. To make matters worse, the adventuring guild has been infiltrated, leaving the already beleaguered city guard with no backup to keep the peace and find the missing creatures. That's where you enter, as you embark on a quest through the city's four quarters to recover the stolen beasts. In our experience, it took nearly 20 hours to fulfill this first main quest, and that was without taking on too many side quests. Of course, this being a BioWare game, the quest for the cure is only the beginning, and indeed, once you find the four creatures, the real game begins.

After a stunning betrayal that leaves Neverwinter and Aribeth reeling, you begin pursuit of the mysterious Cult of the Eye, the perpetrators of the Wailing Death. Apparently, Neverwinter was but a cog in their greater scheme, and of course you have to stop them. But first, you must find them. Along the way, you'll travel to other cities and fantastic locations, meet a host of interesting characters and dastardly villains, and encounter increasingly dangerous enemies.

Despite the game's humble beginnings, or the fact that we've seen some of this before from BioWare, there are still many gems in the plot and quest design.

BELIAL, THE Lord of Fire, is a demon lord whose evil touches a bit of Neverwinter

BEST QUEST SECRETS

Although we tried to get a final copy of the game for this story, as we write this, *Neverwinter Nights* is still a few weeks from shipping, and it shows. The pathfinding ranges from decent to brain-dead, and certain dialogue trees don't seem fully updated. Sometimes, we can complete a quest and an NPC will still act like he's never heard of us. Other times, they'll fully acknowledge our deeds. Bugs are still

DUNGEON MASTERING

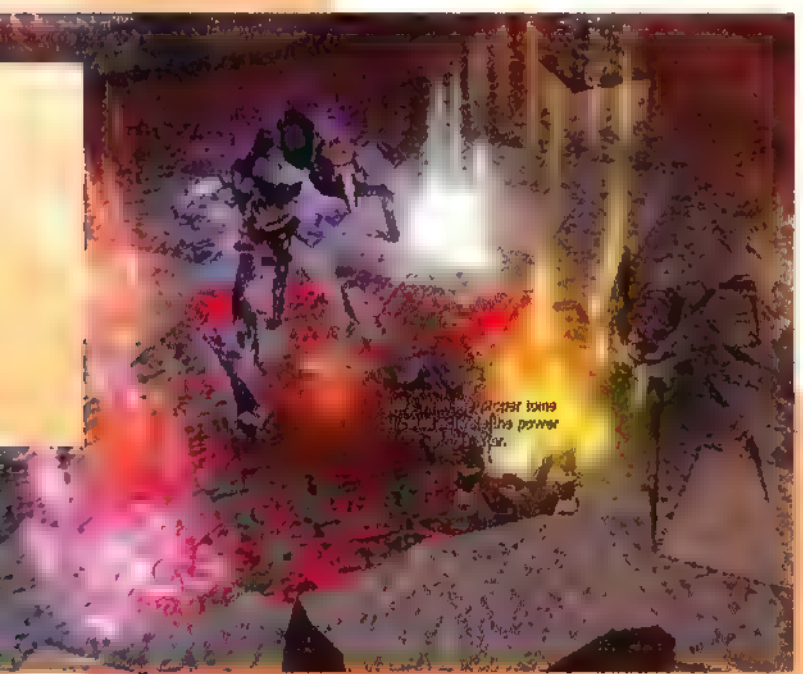
Neverwinter Nights will have the requisite multiplayer support, meaning you can play through the single-player game with your friends, but it will also boast the much-anticipated Dungeon Master client, which lets one player run the game as a real-time DM.

The interface for the DM looks the same as the interface for the regular players with the addition of DM tools in a toolbar at the top of the screen. These tools will let you drop monsters on the map to challenge players who are having an easy time, or kill existing monsters to ease play for the beleaguered party. You can specify which treasure is dropped and even adjust XP awards to make leveling faster or slower. The tools also let you directly control any monster or NPC on the map as if it were a player character. You can talk for the NPC by typing in dialogue in real-time. Unfortunately, there is currently a jarring disconnect between the look of the normal dialogue that players would be accustomed to from the single-player game and the text that you type in as a DM. The scripted text looks elegant in the dialogue box, while the real-time dialogue shows up as floating white text above the NPC's head.

UNDEAD GET the shaft from a cleric's Blade Barrier spell.

The editors of CGW played through a short but very fun DM-led adventure at E3. Running in a party of six, we battled through a small dungeon of undead to free a captured silver dragon. Along the way, the DM fiddled with encounters to ensure that they weren't too hard or easy for us—for example, dropping in new enemies or eliminating existing ones. The DM also ad-libbed for the thankful dragon. (For a more detailed account of our E3 *Neverwinter* adventure, point your Web browser to www.gamers.com/game/48962.)

That session gave us just a hint of what can be done with the DM client. But it's clear that the usefulness of the client is dependent on there being enough modules for the DM to run. Prospective DMs will thus have to brave the daunting Aurora toolset to build their own modules or use modules posted on the Internet by other DMs. After all, if the DM client is to simulate true *D&D*, the adventure can't end once the players finish the Neverwinter campaign.



EVEN IN the early part of the game, there are fantastic surprises in store, like this bound vrock demon. You can exact treasure from it, banish it, or release it.

VENI, VIDI, VICI

(I CAME, I SAW, I KICKED @$$!)

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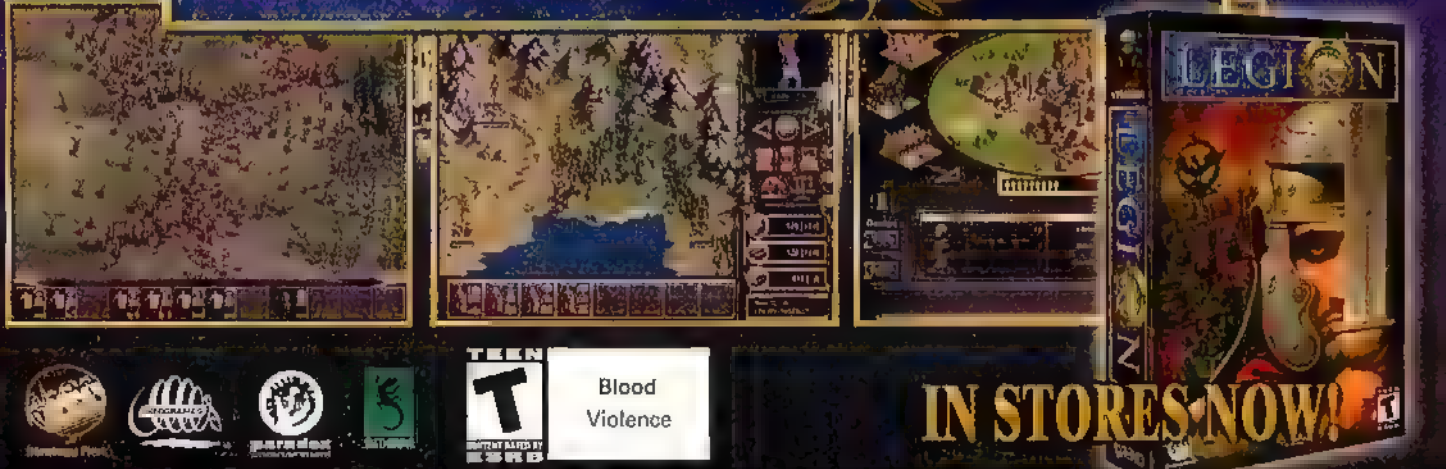
- GAMERS MARK

LEGION



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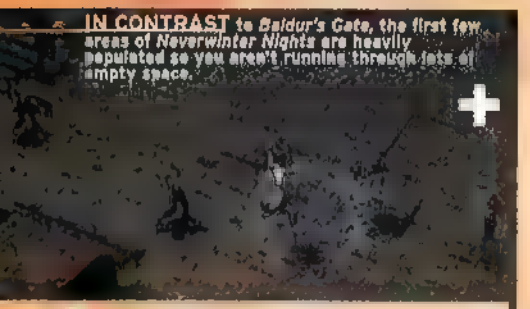
NEVER-WINTER

being worked out every day, and the multiplayer beta test hasn't even started. But the content of the game is fully in, and we like what we've seen so far.

Chapter one is straightforward, but some of the quests in later chapters are far more intriguing. The Spirit of the Wood quest is like something out of the beautiful Hiyao Miyazaki anime "Princess Mononoke," in which nature itself has been poisoned and turned against man, and you have to cure it or kill it. The Village of Eternal Night quest in Charwood, in which you serve as judge for the crimes of two brothers, is also a wonderfully done segment. It highlights what is best about this game. In this quest, two brothers and the small town they ravaged have been suspended in time, pending your arrival to act as judge for their crimes. You must talk to both brothers and find out which one is responsible for the awful act that robbed the town of all its children in one blood-curdling moment. As you race through the quest, you'll take both brothers' statements and grant your ruling, condemning one and freeing the other. You could render the obvious verdict, or you could look beyond the circumstantial evidence and arrive at a more informed judgment. And if you dig even deeper, you could find the true crime behind this grisly circumstance (the truth is amazing!). Like some of the better quests in the game, there is no right way to solve this one; you can do what you're told and never look back, or dig deeper and find a story and experience to reward your effort. Not all quests are as well designed as this one (there are plenty of "go here, kill that" quests), but those that are certainly make this game special.

You will get three things in the *Neverwinter Nights* box this July: the game itself, the Aurora toolset for building custom adventures, and the DM client for running *Neverwinter Nights* and custom-made modules. *Neverwinter Nights* the game is shaping up to be another BioWare classic, and the DM client seems like a great tool. We'll have a better idea of how powerful and easy (or difficult) to use the DM client is when we review the final product next month. We'll also take a look at the most ambitious element of *Neverwinter*, the Aurora toolset. We've waited four years for BioWare's next revolutionary step in role-playing games, and although the hype has given way to reality, the game still holds a lot of things to look forward to as it finally approaches release.



IN CONTRAST to *Baldur's Gate*, the first few areas of *Neverwinter Nights* are heavily populated so you aren't running through lots of empty space.

ONE-MAN PARTY

Neverwinter Nights isn't a party-based RPG like *Baldur's Gate*. You can control only one main character, although you can hire a henchman to follow you. Unfortunately, the AI controls him, and you can't even manipulate his inventory or equip him. At best, you can tell him to follow you, fight nearby enemies, or heal you. Not being able to give more specific orders is frustrating, especially because the AI isn't always responsive—like when a rogue refuses to unlock a chest even after you've clicked on it (which ordinarily prompts him to then use any skills he has on the clicked object). If the AI were working properly, this wouldn't be a problem, but as of the prefinal build, the AI wasn't at 100 percent.

Being able to truly control only one character means your choice of main character is more important than it was in *BG*. You'll get only one secondary character to compensate for your weaknesses. Certain spellcasting classes, like sorcerer and cleric, can summon a temporary creature with a spell, giving you some cannon fodder or a bodyguard. If you play as a sorcerer or wizard, you can have a familiar with you as well (or an animal companion if you play a druid or ranger). The familiar is sort of an exception to the rule of being able to control only your main character: You can possess your familiar and use its skills, but you lose control of yourself. Depending on your class, you can have a party of two to four characters, but you'll mostly control just one.

NOTABLE CHARACTERS

In *Neverwinter Nights*, as you proceed on your quest to uncover the plague and the cult behind it, you'll meet many notable nonplayer characters.

ARIBETH: The beautiful Elfin paladin serves the god of justice, Tyr. She is a loyal protector of the city of Neverwinter and is desperate to cure it of the plague. Aribeth is your main point of contact throughout the game, and although she is initially aloof, you will learn more about her as the game progresses.

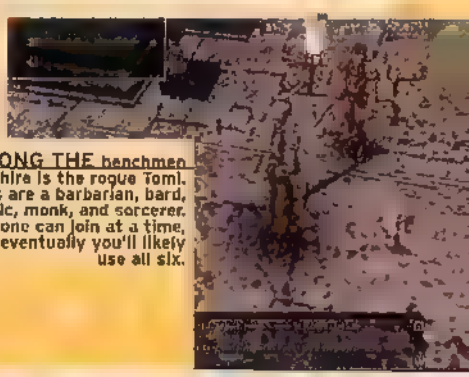
FENTHWICK: Aribeth's lover is your main proponent in the city, championing your quest to save Neverwinter. He is a cleric of Tyr and is responsible for investigating the cult behind the plague.

DESTHER: This imposing cleric serves the god of war, Helm. Sent from Helm's Hold to assist Neverwinter in its hour of need, he and his followers hold off the plague with spells while you search for the cure.

AARIN GEND: The cult's trail leads you to the town of Port Llast, where Neverwinter's chief spy, Aarin Gend, currently resides. He joins Aribeth later in giving you direction and advice.

SOLOMON: Once you cure the plague, the halfling Solomon seeks you out to thank you and provide clues to the cult's whereabouts.

AAWILL: This archdruid watches over the Neverwinter Woods and is dismayed at the Spirit of the Woods' pain and anger. He is barely connected to your main quest, but can provide much advice and will lead even nondruid characters to adventure.



AMONG THE henchmen for hire is the rogue Tomi. Others are a barbarian, bard, cleric, monk, and sorcerer. Only one can join at a time, but eventually you'll likely use all six.

THIRD (EDITION) TIME'S THE CHARM

The most talked about difference between *Neverwinter* and *Baldur's Gate* is *Neverwinter's* use of the third edition *Dungeons & Dragons* rules. Unlike the horribly executed *Pool of Radiance II*, *Neverwinter* implements those rules accurately and authentically. And there are even some tweaks to make third-edition rules a little better, like the beefed-up Toughness feat and new combat skills.

Even casual gamers unfamiliar with the *D&D* rules will see that *Neverwinter* offers plenty of customization and rewards for leveling up. For every level, in addition to hit points and class abilities, you'll get to acquire or improve skills, and for every three levels, you can select a heroic feat (essentially a special ability) such as cleave, for example, which lets you make a free attack on a nearby foe when you kill an enemy in melee. There are more than 30 feats to choose from and two dozen or so skills. Many of the skills are traditional thief skills, such as hiding, moving silently, spotting, and listening; other skills are entirely new, even to third-edition *D&D*, such as parry and discipline, combat skills that let melee fighters counterattack or resist special attacks. In truth, not all skills and feats are created equal, but the variety looks like more than enough to encourage replayability.

Some other benefits of the third edition rules are streamlined combat, faster leveling up, simpler multiclassing, and more options for spellcasters thanks to metamagic feats. These feats in essence let you "power up" your spells. You could apply the Maximize Spell feat to your fireball, for example, and do Maximize Damage instead of rolling dice, or apply the Extend Spell feat to your stoneskin and have it last twice as long.

NIGHTS

THE ESRB VIDEO & COMPUTER GAME RATINGS

Find out whether a computer or video game is right for your home.

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EARLY CHILDHOOD

Titles rated "Early Childhood (EC)" have content that may be suitable for children ages three and older and do not contain any material that parents would find inappropriate.

EVERYONE

Titles rated "Everyone (E)" have content that may be suitable for persons ages six and older. These titles will appeal to people of many ages and tastes. They may contain minimal violence, some comic mischief (for example, slapstick comedy), or some crude language.

TEEN

Titles rated "Teen (T)" have content that may be suitable for persons ages 13 and older. Titles in this category may contain violent content, mild or strong language, and/or suggestive themes.

MATURE

Titles rated "Mature (M)" have content that may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older. These products may include more intense violence or language than products in the Teen category. In addition, these titles may also include mature sexual themes.

ADULTS ONLY

Titles rated "Adults Only (AO)" have content suitable only for adults. These products may include graphic depictions of sex and/or violence. Adults Only products are not intended to be sold or rented to persons under the age of 18.

RATING PENDING

Product has been submitted to the ESRB and is awaiting final rating.

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Reviews

We love games, we hate games Edited by Robert Coffey

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Morrowind

How Do We Rate?

We review only finished games—no betas, no patches

OUTSTANDING The rare game that gets it all right. A must-play experience

VERY GOOD Worthy of your time and money, but there are drawbacks

AVERAGE Either an ambitious design with major flaws, or just vanilla

WEAK Seriously lacking in play value, poorly conceived, or just another clone

ABYSMAL The rare game that gets it all wrong. Pathetic. Toaster material

AWARD-WINNING AND CRITICALLY ACLAIMED

"Whether you're an RPG fan or just love a good, original RTS design, Warlords Battlecry II will keep you coming back again and again."
—Computer Gaming World

"...guaranteed to give you plenty of gameplay hours and fun."
—IGN PC

"Perfect game balance; fantastic AI; strong individual hero development; good tutorial...an absolute must have for fans of the real-time strategy genre."
—PC Gamer

"...the definitive real time strategy game."
—Computer Games

"...everything you could want in a real-time strategy."
—PC Strategy Gamer

TEEN T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

BLOOD
VIOLENCE

WARLORDS BATTLECRY II

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www.warlordsbattlecry2.com

PC CD ROM

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Ubi Soft

www.ubisoft.com

The wandering monsters look great, but there isn't much variety among them.

The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind

Like an MMORPG, without the pesky MMO **By Ron Dulin**

Softworks DEVELOPER Bethesda Softworks
GENRE RPG URL www.bethsoft.com
ESRB RATING Teen; blood, violence PRICE $44.95

REQUIREMENTS Pentium III 500, 256MB RAM, 1GB hard drive space, 32MB video card RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS Pentium III 800 MULTIPLAYER None

Morrowind comes close to being the massive, sprawling, open-ended, role-playing epic you've always dreamed of. The opening sequence is ingenious and offers a fitting introduction. You have been mysteriously released from prison and led from a transport ship to a census office. After completing your paperwork, which functions as the game's character creation process, you are set free to do as you please. The world of *Morrowind* is your oyster.

Your character's origin as an ex-con is appropriate, because *Morrowind* is all about freedom. Your role is whatever you choose it to be. There are guilds, religious factions, and political factions. You can ally yourself with any combination of these or none at all. You can follow the main story—which reveals the reasons behind your release and puts you on a journey toward discovering and possibly fulfilling ancient prophecies—or simply wander around the game's many dungeons and towns. There are so many tasks, so many people to help and hunt that you'll be hard-pressed to stick to any single goal for very long. You are often encouraged to go off and find other things to do and not stick to any particular thread for too long.

Your freedom extends to the character you choose to play. You can follow one of the basic templates (choose from generic fighters and thieves to more exotic witch hunters and spellswords), or you can build your own custom character from the many skills available. And if you don't like the character you create, you can always pick up skills as you proceed through the game.

Morrowind doesn't follow the standard system of leveling up, so your character doesn't gain experience in the usual sense. Instead, you gain levels as your skills increase, and your skills increase through use or training. The system is good but not without faults. A fighter who uses a sword and shield will advance more rapidly than one who uses a two-handed sword, because the former is making use of two skills and the latter is using only one.

Morrowind is all about freedom: Your role is whatever you choose it to be.

Choosing your skills is important: They affect everything. Nonplayer characters will react more amicably to you if you have a good speechcraft skill. Locks can be picked and traps disarmed more easily with a high security skill. Become skilled at enchanting, and you can imbue weapons and armor with powerful bonuses. And you should really, really become good at enchanting—it may be the most powerful skill in the game. Make a sword that leeches health with every successful strike, and you'll be practically invincible.

This may or may not be a good thing. Although *Morrowind* accommodates a wide variety of characters and choices, the result is that it can occasionally seem mechanical. NPC interactions are a prime example, being often generic and lifeless. Picking locks and disarming traps is simply a matter of arming the right tool and trying over and over and over again—you suffer no consequence for failure.

There are other problems. The real-time melee combat is a bit too basic. You have a few different moves, but it feels more like a first-person slasher than a traditional RPG. There isn't much variety among the monsters, and so combat gets repetitive after a while. Merchants are dirt poor, and thus selling off big-ticket items is often impossible. But *Morrowind* ships with a relatively easy-to-use editor, and mods and plug-ins of all varieties have already started to appear. It's simple, and encouraged, to change anything you don't like. Too easy? Make it harder. Can't sell stuff? Give the merchants more gold. Unfortunately, the editor can't fix two of the game's biggest shortcomings: occasional crash bugs and a journal that records virtually every one of your actions but fails to put the information into a usable format. The journal is an anal-retentive nightmare of confusion.

The latest in ebony armors and Daedric shields, two of the rarest styles of armor you can find.

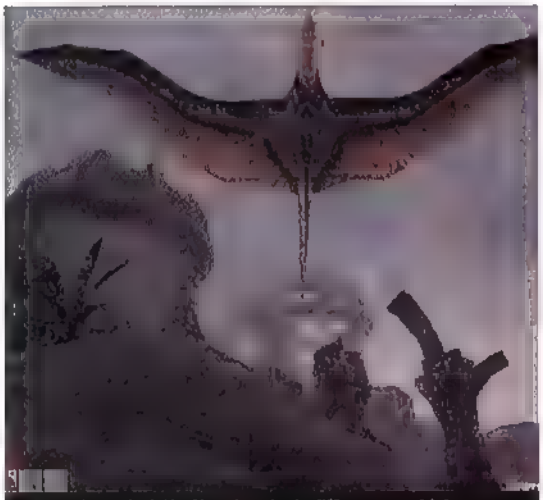
Vivec is a massive city, harboring every race and culture of *Morrowind*. Every other city in *Morrowind* is just as beautifully rendered.

But to nitpick on *Morrowind*'s mechanical faults is to miss the big picture. The world is full of surprises. There are frequent moments that are downright awe inspiring, like reaching the summit of a mountain and seeing the ruins of a buried city sprawled out beyond the mist below you. Most everything in the game is visually impressive. But it's more than that: You can enter every ruin, every tomb, and there is constant anticipation of finding some rare artifact or weapon, or even a book that will tell you more about *Morrowind*'s voluminous history. New areas await discovery, and traveling between the populated areas is more than just a routine series of encounters. The journey itself is as exciting as any particular story thread you choose to follow.

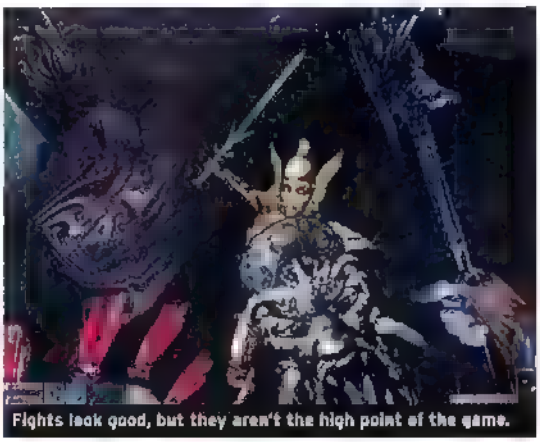
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind is one of the most ambitious role playing games ever, combining the story of a single-player game with the intriguing exploratory aspect of an MMORPG. It's the kind of game you imagined when the genre was in its infancy, when monochrome blobs and boxy mazes seemed to have limitless potential. There are problems with some fundamental mechanics, but *Morrowind* offers a huge world of interesting paths and choices, and its faults just serve as occasional reminders that it's only a game.

VERDICT ★★★★½

Almost more a way of life than a game, *Morrowind* is the definitive open-ended RPG epic.



You will learn to hate the abundant cliff racers, which swoop out of the sky with a high-pitched squeal.



Fights look good, but they aren't the high point of the game.

Might and Magic IX

Too much of a bad thing

By Raphael Liberatore

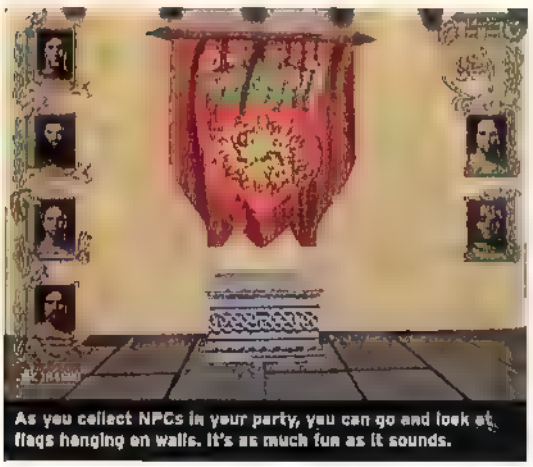
PUBLISHER 3DO (800) 336-3506 New World Computing
URL www.3do.com
ESRB RATING Teen; blood, violence PRICE $39.95

REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 400, 64MB RAM, 1GB hard drive space
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS 128MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER None

I've been a dedicated *Might and Magic* fan since the beginning. The original game was groundbreaking, and most of the sequels were just as good or better. But if 2000's wheezy *Might and Magic VIII* raised the question of whether the series should be laid to rest, *Might and Magic IX* answers with a loud, resounding yes. In fact, about the only thing the inept *Might and Magic IX* does well is confirming its irrelevance. The game is damned boring and, worse, lacks the growth and innovation you expect of a successor to such a storied franchise.

As with all *Might and Magic* games, you start by creating a party of characters. Actually, no, you make just one character from an incredibly limited palette of two classes and four races.

Having just one inventory screen for each of the two classes, regardless of race or sex, is just plain lazy of the designers. Unfortunately, shortcuts like this can be found throughout the game.



As you collect NPCs in your party, you can go and look at flags hanging on walls. It's as much fun as it sounds.

Rule No. 1 of RPG design: You can't go wrong with skeletons.

The lack of character specific items or inventory lists makes character creation even more numbing. Also of concern, each character's paper doll image, dialogue, and onscreen expression is simplistic and trite, lacking the personality and flair that have been this series' trademarks. Never has an RPG character been a more unappealing aggregate of numbers and stats. As for the NPCs that join your party, you never see them, hear them, or even know what the hell they are. You never get an opportunity to figure out what their stats or equipment are, let alone find out what they are doing during combat. They just kinda fight alongside you, I guess. They've gotta be, right?

Your party starts the adventure in a large world called Chedian, which comprises six major regions and several surrounding frontier areas. There's plenty of adventuring, but your party must chat during every nonthreatening encounter if you want to get enough information to move the story forward. Adventuring relies on a quest of one sort or another, through which you gain experience and items. Dialogue is cheesy, and some quests are just lame, such as having to fetch a book from around the corner to complete some required objective. In a short time, the quests grow tedious.

You cannot control your party members, so combat is painfully simple with an unforgivable lack of visual feedback. You get no visual clues as to whether your party is pulling the hurt on the monsters attacking you. As a result, fighting lacks strategy, your own confusion generates the paltry sense of tension, and too many monsters come at your party with no apparent purpose other than grinding the game to a halt.

To top it off, the graphics look as though they belong in *Might and Magic IV*, not the ninth version of the game. Somehow, between eliminating that handy radar screen, the fun character voices, and a little thing I like to call "role-playing," the developers found the time to make the LithTech engine actually look old and ugly. Then again, given that so many of the monsters look the same, maybe the developers just never gave the engine a chance to shine.

The challenge in fighting the monsters is figuring out if you're even doing anything to them.

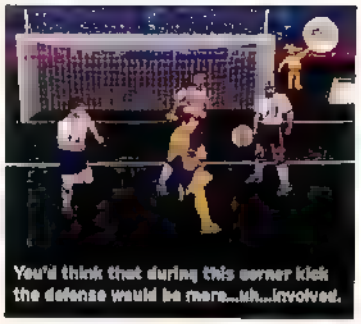
Might and Magic IX is the last rusty nail driven into the coffin of this once-proud series, and that nail is hammered home right through the soft, gooey corpse of this gamer's fond *Might and Magic* memories. There are collections of previous versions of the series in bargain bins across America. Buy one of those instead.

VERDICT ★½☆☆☆☆

The biggest disappointment yet in the series will appeal only to those who must complete their set of *Might and Magic*.

Massively Merciless.
SHADOWBANE
Persistent Challenge, Persistent World.
RATING PENDING
RPI
ubi.com
shadowbane.com
Ubi Soft

Don't pay any attention to the jaggies on the goal posts and the field lines! In spite of what ATI and Nvidia keep saying, no one's using antialiasing.


You'd think that during this corner kick the defense would be more...uh...involved.

After every goal, *2002 FIFA* replays in slow motion from various angles.

2002 FIFA World Cup

Nothing beats being the only game in town **By William O'Neal**

PUBLISHER Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER EA Sports
GENRE Sports
URL www.easports.com
ESRB RATING Everyone
PRICE $39.95

REQUIREMENTS Pentium 233, 32MB RAM (64MB for Windows 2000, 128MB for Windows XP), 4MB 3D graphics accelerator, 65MB free hard drive space RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS None MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT LAN, Internet (2-4 players)

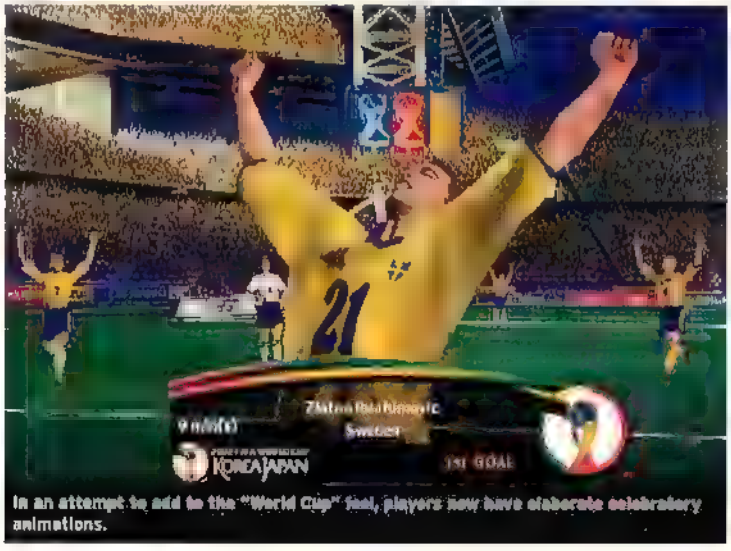
If you're a PC gamer who's interested in playing the latest and greatest soccer games, your choices are limited to *FIFA*, *FIFA*, and this new game I heard about by EA Sports called *FIFA*. That said, we gotta give praise to the big fella—*2002 FIFA World Cup* is actually a pretty good game.

Hardcore types who like their sports games on the sim-side are already licking the stamps on their letter bombs. This game is not at all about depth. Rather, EA Sports has created a soccer game that's...well...fun! *2002 FIFA World Cup* sports only two play modes: World Cup Tournament (a seven game series) and Friendly. Unlike previous iterations of *FIFA*, this version boasts no manager mode. So if you're looking to do stuff like draft teams or manage a squad's front office, then go to the U.K. and buy a management game there. The Brits love that stuff.

If you've played *FIFA* titles in the past you'll welcome the familiar interface and in-game commentary by John Motsen and Andy Gray. Like a true EA Sports game, the 2002 version of *FIFA* plays a little differently than its predecessors. (We all know how EA Sports likes to muck around with things like pacing and feel.) *2002 FIFA World Cup* is more like watching a televised soccer match than playing an arcade game. In other words, the game moves at a slower pace. Although this adds to the game's realism, it will disappoint players looking for a more arcadelike experience. At the Professional level, my games routinely ended with penalty shoot-outs, as achieving victory wasn't a simple matter of giving the rock to the fastest guy and spinning your way to the goal.

Not content to change only the game's pace, EA Sports also likes to tweak the passing schemes each year. In the 2002 version, making crosses is decidedly more difficult, a change that—like the altered pace—adds to the game's overall difficulty. While in previous years, crosses were as easy as hitting the B button on your SideWinder GamePad, now you actually have to aim.

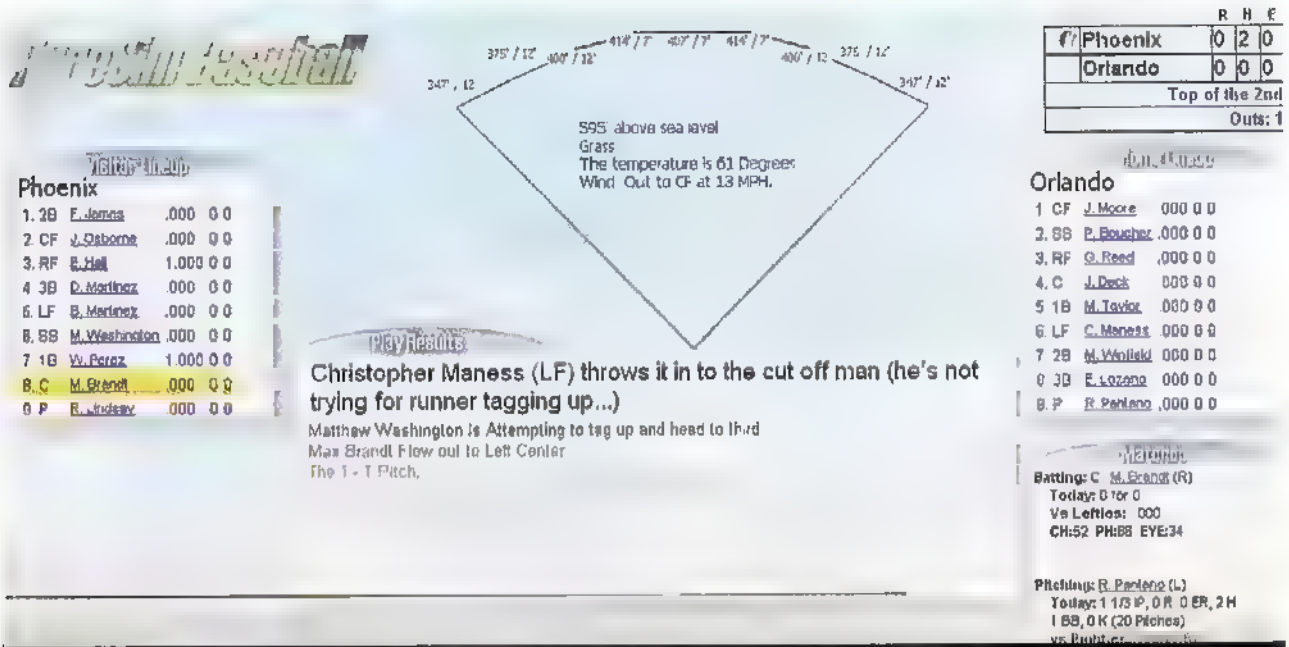
2002 FIFA World Cup overcomes all the nonexistent competition to be the best "real" soccer game for the PC. (If not for the Xbox version, it would also be the best-looking soccer game around. But that's all that I'm going to say about the Xbox.) Fortunately, given the lack of other options, the PC version is at least a fun game to play.



In an attempt to add to the "World Cup" feel, players now have elaborate celebratory animations.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

This game looks great and its two play modes are fun. Gamers looking for more depth, though, will be disappointed.



As the GM, you have to trust your manager to make the right decisions as you sit in your luxury box and chew on your fingernails.

PureSim Baseball

Sim-ply super **By Rob Smolka**

PUBLISHER Shaun Sullivan
DEVELOPER Shaun Sullivan
URL www.puresim.com
GENRE Sports
ESRB RATING Everyone
PRICE $27.99

REQUIREMENTS Pentium III 500, 64MB RAM, 30MB hard drive space
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS Pentium III 800, 128MB RAM, 100MB hard drive space
MULTIPLAYER None

For three years, Shaun Sullivan spent his spare after-work hours and weekends toiling away on his vision of the perfect baseball simulator. He wanted to make a game that put you in the shoes of the general manager of a big league franchise, with all of the decisions and strategies that go with the job. And while it's not the first or only game of its type, it definitely ranks among the elite.

PureSim Baseball's biggest strength is its incredible interface. Every game maker should take the time to study this marvelously clean and player-friendly design. There's never a moment when you don't know what to do next or where to turn for the information you're looking for, and that's especially crucial in a game like this that contains so much data and so many menus.

Some may find the lack of Major League licenses a drawback, but *PureSim* is about creating your own baseball universe, and it seems fitting to use fictional teams and players. It also makes sense that as the general manager, you can only watch the games in progress—you can't influence them. (That's why you pay your manager the big bucks!)

With *Out of the Park Baseball 4* and *Baseball Mogul 2003* out there, *PureSim Baseball* faces some stiff competition—and manages to come out on top. You can purchase the game only on the Website, but a fully functional 10-day free trial version is available so you can see if you like it. I'm betting you will.

VERDICT ★★★★½

A sterling addition to the subgenre of sports text sims.

GAME PATCHES

Revisionist History

Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast

By Thomas L. McDonald

I finished *Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast* yesterday, and today they released a patch. My dumb luck I didn't get the fixes for problems I didn't even know I had.

Most of the major fixes were made to the multiplayer aspect of the game. Lightsabers now do less damage at the very start and very end of a swing—subtle changes, but an improvement. Force powers are a little better balanced, with higher casting costs for Heal and Drain. A bug had prevented cycling through to trip mines and detonator packs if you were out of thermal detonators, but this has been fixed. One of the odder changes requires you to double-tap the jump button in order to backflip, something I don't think many people requested.

On the single-player side, tweaks are few but fairly important. AI has been sharpened, with enemies now responding to a body lying in their field of vision and avoiding thermal detonators more effectively. A scripting glitch that supposedly prevented Jan from landing on Artus Topside due to a vanishing AT-ST has been fixed.

For good measure, LucasArts has also thrown in four new multiplayer duel levels with bot support. I've had some pretty annoying problems with clipping-causing, for example, stormtroopers to fall into a wall and twitch like a squirrel on a power line—but these problems remain.

Jedi Knight II was not a very buggy game to begin with, but it's good see LucasArts taking the time to polish it.

Playing as the Green Goblin himself ranks as the coolest "play as the villain" secret of any game.

Spider-Man

Does whatever a spider can...almost By Thierry Nguyen

PUBLISHER Activision
DEVELOPER LTI Gray Matter/Treyarch URL www.universalheroes.com/game_themovie.html ESRB RATING Everyone; violence
PRICE $39.99

REQUIREMENTS Pentium III 500, 128MB RAM, 3D card with hardware transform and lighting, 800MB hard drive space RECOMMENDED Pentium III 750MHz MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT None

With more than $200 million in the bank after the first week and a half, Sam Raimi's *Spider Man* made comic book properties very hip. Activision is wise enough to actually have good Marvel-based titles, and although *Spider-Man* is another good entry into the comic book game genre, it doesn't seem quite as good as the first *Spider-Man* game from Activision.

Think of this title as an "enhanced" version of the movie. In fact, Tobey Maguire and Willem Dafoe supply the voices for their respective characters. (Maguire sounds a bit underwhelmed, but Dafoe gets into it and hams it up.) Most of the game borrows heavily from the movie's look, feel, and events, but it offers a little more supervillainy. The movie focuses on the redesigned Green Goblin as the villain, and the game adds Shocker, Vulture, Scorpion, and some weird killer robots. Missions in the 22 levels range from finding Uncle Ben's killer in a warehouse to fighting the Vulture near the Empire State building, to fighting the climactic bridge duel with the Green Goblin.

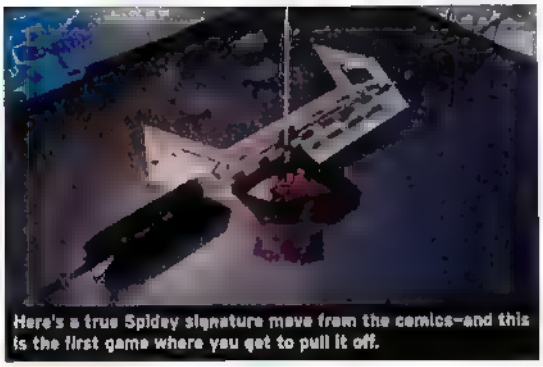
Swingin' Moves

Spider-Man does a good job of building on the gameplay from the previous games. The combination of platform jumping and websinging has been preserved, and it's enhanced by a deeper fighting system and the addition of aerial combat. Previously, combat was merely reduced to frantic, repetitive bursts of tapping either the "punch" or "kick" key; now there's an entire combo system. In addition to signature Spidey maneuvers (Web Dome, Web Gloves Impact Web), you can pick up new moves, such as the Flip Mule or the Scissor Kick, from the golden spiders scattered throughout the game. You now have to show at least a small measure of tactical skill when taking down Shocker or fighting a group of Hunter-Killer robots.

The best addition by far is the aerial combat. Using the new camera-locking system, you can keep enemies like Vulture or Green Goblin constantly in view as you websling around the city, trying to line up either a webshot or a good land-on-and-punch combo. The few

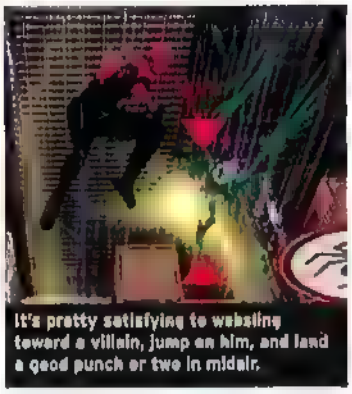
The few aerial combat levels really capture the kinetic thrill of a typical Spider-Man fight.

You can't have a comic book game without giant killer automatons.


Here's a true Spidey signature move from the comics—and this is the first game where you get to pull it off.

The graphics make this Web Dome look a lot cooler than before.

The Alex Ross costume design is cool, but there aren't very many costumes in the game.


It's pretty satisfying to websling toward a villain, jump on him, and land a good punch or two in midair.

aerial combat levels really capture the kinetic thr l of a typical Sp der-Man fight.

Looks Are Everything

Remember: This is a straight-up PC port. Get a gamepad handy and don't expect more than sharper graphics (in fact, only the Xbox version has new content). The graphics will probably requ re a bit of a hardware upgrade, as the minimum is a ready a Pentium III 500 with a hefty video card, but then again, websinging at 1280x960 resolution is a good way to show off your PC.

Unfortunately, the levels aren't up to par with those of the original *Spider-Man* game. One could attribute that to the change in developer—from NeverSoft (the crew behind the *Tony Hawk* franchise) to Treyarch—and to the fact that the first game lifted from the comics, while this one is grounded more in the movie. The previous game was a pastiche of zany situations and villains pulled straight from the comics, a loving tribute to the weird places and people Spidey gets involved with. This game has pretty good level selection, yet it doesn't seem to capture the pure spirit of Spidey that the first game did. There are some cool and fun levels (I ke the aerial combat .evels) but there isn't anything that feels as fun or as "purely Spidey" as the famous helicopter chase level from the first game.

Also, the camera isn't quite active enough. It doesn't follow you as wel as the camera in the first game, lagging behind too much for my taste. Manual aim ng and camera-target-lock help, but sometimes my perspective still gets severely compromised by the camera. It's a small step back from the previous game's sol d camera.

Minor qu bbles aside, this is a decent part of a very good comic book plat form game. It lacks the sheer joy and zaniness of the previous game, but through and through, it's a good *Spider-Man* game. The more I played it, the more I felt that a marriage between this engine and the level design of the previous game would result in the perfect *Spider-Man* game.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

A good, beautifully designed platform part that's not as good as the first *Spider-Man* game.

This cut-scene offers more drama and excitement than pretty much the rest of the game.

Die Hard: Nakatomi Plaza

Yippee-kai-hey! This game sucks! By Tom Price

PUBLISHER Sierra/Fox Interactive
GENRE Action
URL www.sierra.com/games/dieharddnp/
ESRB RATING Mature
PRICE $29.99

REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 400, 64MB RAM, 660MB hard drive space
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS Pentium III 600, 128MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER None

The history of games turned into movies is littered with some putrid crap. But turning movies into games has generally been a more successful endeavor. Generally, I could use the loathsome *Die Hard: Trilogy* from 1996 as an example of how movie-to-game licenses can get screwed up, but that would be redundant. (Shut up, PSX fanboys—*Trilogy* sucked on the PC.) Why anyone would think it was a good idea to make yet another crappy game built off the same Bruce Willis-themed, 14-year-old license is beyond me. What, was *Look Who's Talking* unavailable?

Die Hard: Nakatomi Plaza is at best a mediocre first person shooter, full of unpolished surfaces, rough corners, and scores of head-scratchingly bizarre design decisions. Somehow it manages to have a couple of well-produced elements. Playing this game left me with the same feeling I get when I see a bad movie with a great performance in it.

First, the voice acting is a joke. I understand how expensive it would have been to get Bruce Willis to do his own voice, but they could have found someone who didn't sound like he was pumped full of horse tranquilizers.

Second, the weapons suck. I know the developers wanted to remain faithful to the movie—hence the persistent left handed weapon model—but you have access to only four guns, and you'll use one of them, the MP5, throughout 90 percent of the game, mostly because it's the only gun you'll be able to find ammo for.

The levels are painfully repetitive (hello, you're in an office building), and the designers commit the cardinal sin of making you backtrack repeatedly to pad gaming time and save on disk space.

The one surprisingly good aspect of the game is the enemy AI. The terrorists are fairly smart, and they employ intelligent tactics. They know how to run and use cover as well as assess a threat. If they have the numbers or better weapons, they won't back down, but if you come into the firefight with an advantage, they'll look for a better vantage point. It doesn't make the game worth playing or anything, but it's worth a call out.

The other thing that's worth a call out is *DNNP*'s dubious distinction of being the first computer game (we think) to utter the word...well, let's just say it begins with "mother" and ends with "ucker." And utter it it does, repeatedly.

It's not easy to recreate a movie in game form, and the best interpretations have focused more on the movie's atmosphere and environment than on the exact storyline (the *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* games, for instance). There's a reason for this: pacing. The pacing needs of a movie that you passively watch and a game that you actively play are different. That's why a long movie lasts three hours and a short game lasts 10 hours. *Nakatomi Plaza* doesn't have decent movie or game pacing, even though it follows the plot of the movie pretty faithfully. The result is a game with long boring stretches punctuated by familiar scenes that don't quite live up to their silver-screen counterparts. All told, *Die Hard: Nakatomi Plaza* doesn't work.

I'm shooting my 400th bad guy with the same gun I've been using since the game started. Yay!

That's one graphically advanced-looking product placement, I mean fighter.

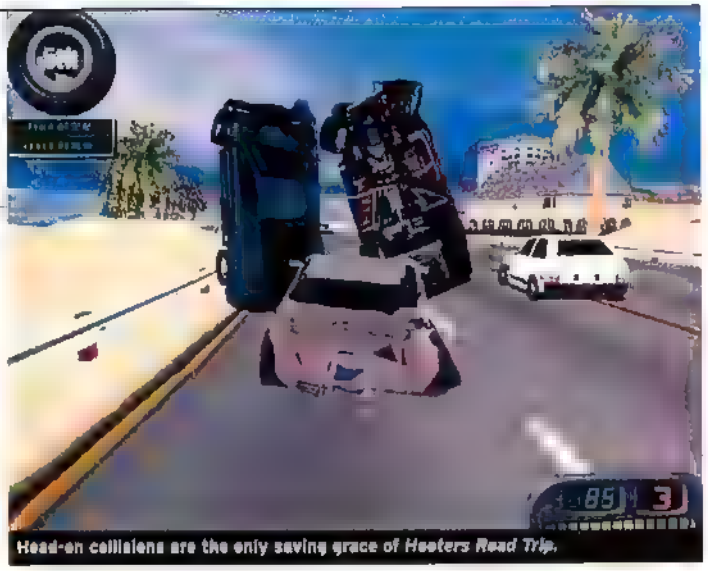
VERDICT ★½☆☆☆☆

Makes me never want to see the movie again for fear it will remind me of the game.

Hooters Road Trip

Seriously, we go there for the wings

By Gord Goble



Head-on collisions are the only saving grace of *Hooters Road Trip*.

PUBLISHER Ubi Soft DEVELOPER Hoplite Research GENRE Racing URL www.ubi.com ESRB RATING Teen; suggestive themes PRICE $19.99

REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 350, 64MB RAM, 600MB hard drive space RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS No sense of self-respect MULTIPLAYER None

Hooters Road Trip is an embarrassing journey down a road that is thankfully less traveled. It is embarrassing for the dozen Hooters "employees" appearing in the game, who are clearly uncomfortable delivering lines such as "Ooweee, you finished first!" and "Hey there, welcome to Jacksonville!" It is embarrassing to anyone who buys it for the "hoot" in Hooters because they'll find nothing but a disjointed assortment of poorly produced five-second clips and no nudity. And it is embarrassing for the developer, because the game surely didn't turn out as envisioned.

It's not that *Road Trip* doesn't have its moments. In fact, plowing through its commendably lengthy urban and rural thoroughfares and engaging in all manner of topsy-turvy multivehicular collisions is darned, uh...titillating.

Unfortunately, you'll often be too busy extracting yourself from the off-track scenery to care—the irritated victim of exceptionally loose physics, exceptionally slim roadways, and frighteningly mushy roadside shoulders. The game features just eight venues, most of which must be revisited ad infinitum if you ever decide to undertake its single championship round, and it does not offer desirable perks such as multiplayer racing or a garage and upgrade shop.

Dynamic four-way traffic and high-speed collisions aside, *Road Trip* is not a good arcade driving game. Nor is it a satisfying peep show. In the end, racers and leering perverts alike will be very disappointed.

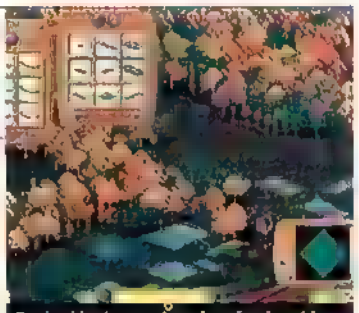
Hooters Road Trip's vehicles are noticeably flatter than its women.

VERDICT ★☆☆☆☆

Proof that fast babes and fast cars, although a titillating combination, do not alone make for a good game.

Golf Resort Tycoon II

SimGolf if Sid Meier had sniffed glue as a child By Thomas L. McDonald


Each object you place is raised and has a huge dead zone around the edge, so no other object can come within several feet of it.

PUBLISHER Activision Value DEVELOPER Cat Daddy Games GENRE Torture URL www.activision.com ESRB RATING Everyone PRICE $19.99

REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 266, 32MB RAM, 500MB hard drive space RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS Receipt for store return MULTIPLAYER You're kidding, right?

I know this much: The creators of *Golf Resort Tycoon II* hate all that is good and pure and right in this world. Nothing else can explain this joy-sucking black hole of a game.

It didn't have to be this way. There's a glimmer of goodness in *GRT II*. Terrain and object graphics look a shade better than in *SimGolf*, and the 3D golfing mode promises the opportunity to play a custom course. But any goodwill these tiny pleasures generate vanishes once you begin playing.

As in any tycoon style game, you're given money, land, and a course-building tool palette. In the weird world of Cat Daddy Games, however, people build golf courses by placing predesigned sand and water features that can't be customized or placed next to other objects, creating a patchwork-quilt Frankencourse where nothing is just where you want it or looks the way you want it to.

The management end of the game doesn't fare much better, with course ratings that don't respond to obvious improvements, a warped financial model, and a terminally boring midgame slump during which you simply wait for new improvements to become available. In the 3D golfing mode, you use a twitchy, unresponsive power bar to play on a course that is so heavily fogged you can't see the length of a 9-iron shot.

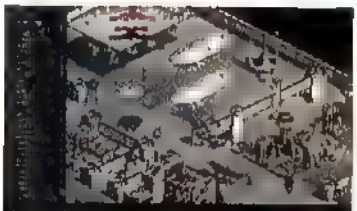
The truly disturbing part? This is an improvement over the first *Golf Resort Tycoon*. Run away.

VERDICT ★☆☆☆☆

A triple-Advil-migraine-inducing trip to the very bowels of hell.

The four stand-alone scenarios were the winning entries in a LucasArts-sponsored scenario design contest. This is Escape from Hoth, modeled after *The Empire Strikes Back*.

New scenarios can be very difficult—an air assault with 90 percent casualties was the only tactic that worked here.



LucasArts has provided dozens of editor-only units to place in custom missions.

Star Wars Galactic Battlegrounds: Clone Campaigns

Play the movie! By Thomas L. McDonald

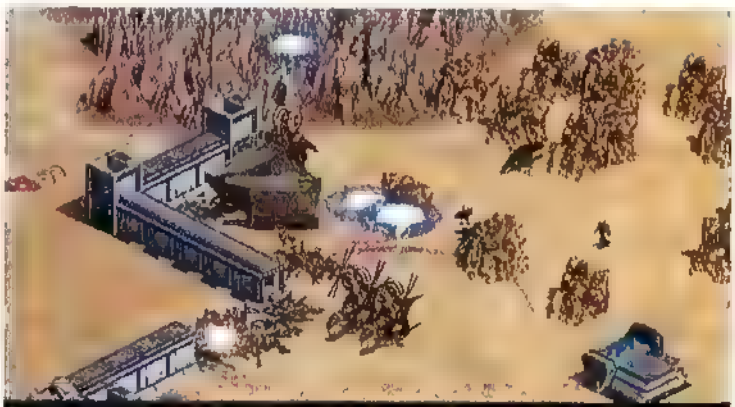
PUBLISHER LucasArts
DEVELOPER LucasArts
GENRE Real-time strategy
URL www.clonecampaigns.com ESRB RATING Teen: violence PRICE $29.95

REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 233, 32MB RAM, 750MB hard drive space (total with *Galactic Battlegrounds* install)
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS Pentium III 300, 64MB RAM (96MB for Windows 2000 and XP), 4MB graphics card
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT LAN, Internet (2-8 players)

Prior to *Galactic Battlegrounds*, LucasArts had a dismal track record with strategy games. They finally got smart and licensed the bullet-proof *Age of Kings* engine. While the result was dismissed by some as little more than a glorified mod pack, *Galactic Battlegrounds* is a real hoot, and *Clone Campaigns* improves upon it in significant ways.

A far-reaching add-on designed to tie in with *Episode II: Attack of the Clones*, *Clone Campaigns* centers around two new civilizations that bring factions and units from the movie into the game. The Confederacy of Independent Systems and the Galactic Republic each get a seven-mission campaign, with the Republic campaign locked until completion of the Confederacy campaign. Early missions are deceptively simple, but things get more difficult in the third mission. As it should be with an add-on pack, most are expert-level missions, but at least they start you out slowly.

Between the additional units for the two factions and units added to the scenario builder, the game has about 200 new units. All the civs get a few important new unit types that can be used in the old campaigns as well. The most potent is the Air Cruiser, a Tech Level 4 monster that can take down AA turrets with ease. A smaller, but tactically important, addition is the power droid, which functions as a little mobile power core. A smattering of new units, including A-Wings and Jedi Starfighters, have also been given to other civs for use in the old campaigns.



The new civilizations also got new art, and all of the old art has been upgraded, so *Clone Campaigns* simply looks better than the initial *Galactic Battlegrounds* release.

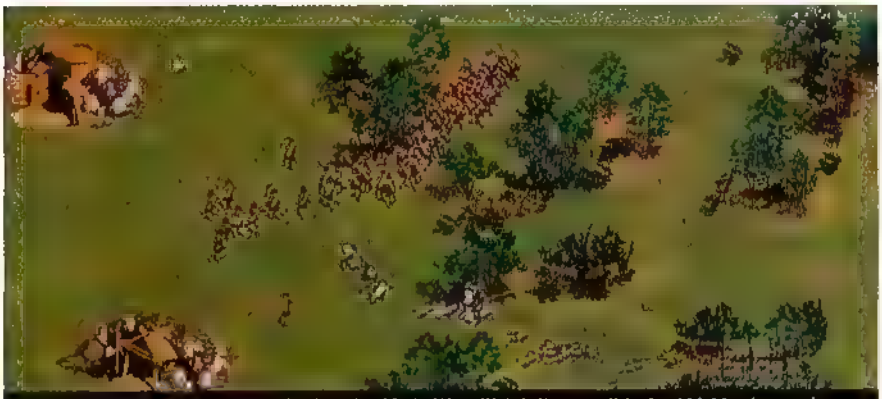
LucasArts has added more than a dozen technologies to the game and made countless enhancements to units, buildings, and technology upgrades. The result is better game balance and civilizations that are even more distinct—no two play alike. On the downside, Lucas included a measly four user-made stand-alone scenarios.

It's hard to argue with such a thorough retooling and expansion, however. The old game now plays and looks better, and the new campaigns provide 30-plus hours of interesting expert missions. Fans will enjoy it, and those unimpressed by the initial release might change their minds. I certainly did.

Most missions here are expert level, but at least they start you slowly.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

Expert-level missions and a complete graphical and gameplay overhaul make this a satisfying enhancement.



Art of War's revamped engine better handles big battles. Watch those well-trained highlanders make mincemeat out of assaulting pikemen.

Cossacks: The Art of War

It's definitely bigger and, yep, it's even better **By Loyd Case**

PUBLISHER CDV Software
DEVELOPER GSC Game World GENRE Real-time strategy URL www.cossacks.com ESRB RATING Teen; blood, violence PRICE $29.95

REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 200, 32MB RAM, 200MB hard drive space, original *Cossacks* game RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 266, 64MB RAM MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT LAN, Internet (2-8 players)

The original *Cossacks* game pushed *Age of Empires*-style real-time strategy to great heights but creaked under the weight of its ambitions. The new *Cossacks: The Art of War* expands on smooths the rough edges and creates a complete game experience that's compelling, if sometimes unwieldy.

Staking out an era just a little later than *Age of Kings*, the first *Cossacks* offered features such as true formations, massive populations, and a more robust economic model. But by the time you got to the big armies, flaws in the game engine made for a joyless experience. So Ukrainian developer GSC added some new features and repaired the engine a bit. The result

for setting up initial formations, but managing an army is much easier than in the original. Management is also eased by the ability of small groups of units to guard other important units, such as artillery.

Multiplayer and skirmish options have increased. You can now play with mixed groups of human and AI players. If you're playing online, there's a worldwide leader board that tracks wins and losses and ranks players against each other. Maps can be huge now. In one multiplayer game, it took 15 minutes to march an army across a continent, even with game speed set fairly high. Playing on a big map really hones your planning and strategic skills.

When you turn to skirmish or multiplayer mode, the game shines.

s a better game than the original.

Art of War has new units, campaigns and abilities. The new campaigns are perhaps the weakest additions, being in the tradition of heavily scripted, puzzlelike maps that are more frustrating than fun. When you turn to skirmish or multiplayer mode, though, the game shines. GSC listened to some of the criticisms of the game and made life much easier for the player. One godsend is the ability to manage your empire while paused—this is critical when you have a thousand units to track.

You can now create groups, which are essentially formations of mixed formations. Your artillery will no longer be left behind, and your cavalry won't charge ahead and be slaughtered. There are still odd numerical requirements

In the end, it's the combat that pulls you in. Watching a group of highlanders ripple-fire at a company of charging pikemen, step back, and then turn and fire again gives virtual Wellingtons real goosebumps. Sea combat is less sophisticated than land warfare, but it's still a visceral thrill to see a ship-of-the-line chew through frigates like a weed-eater through dry grass.

The *Art of War* is a clear winner, and finally fulfills the goals of the original game. The only shame is that it took the expansion to deliver the goods.

VERDICT ★★★★½

Massive armies and an aggressive AI should delight most RTS players—just not in the bland single-player campaigns.

Vazhar
by Full Sail Student
Brian German

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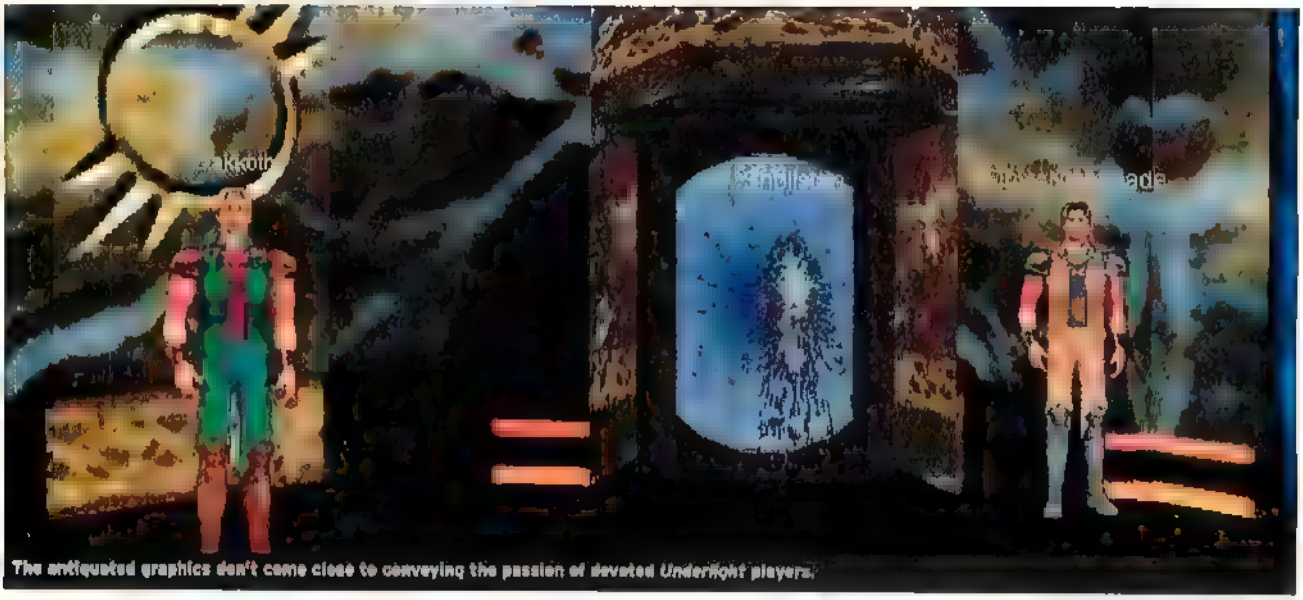


The antiquated graphics don't come close to conveying the passion of devoted *Underlight* players.

Underlight

On the cutting edge of 10 years ago By Arcadian Del Sol

PUBLISHER Lyra Studios
DEVELOPER Lyra Studios
URL www.underlight.com
ESRB RATING Not rated
PRICE 30-day free trial, then $9.95 a month

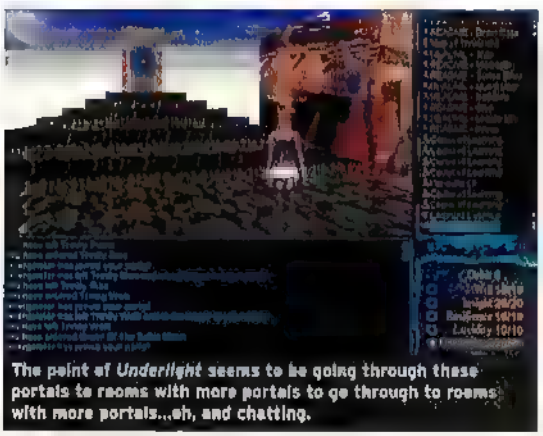
REQUIREMENTS Pentium 90, 16MB RAM, 60MB hard drive space
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS Pentium 133, 32MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT Internet

Old-school gamers like me have an annoying habit of telling you how great it was "back in the day." We didn't mind the horrible graphics and the painfully annoying bleeps and tools from our speakers. We had games that had substance and heart. Graphics and music were not what games were all about back then—it was about the story and the message and the experience. I'd like to believe that. I really would. Unfortunately, I have disappointed myself and am an embarrassment to old-school gamers around the world. I didn't like *Underlight*, and my reasons for not liking it are about as petty and shallow as they can get.

Underlight is a multiplayer online role-playing game with a unique concept that's penned with an unrivaled level of depth and detail. Players, known as "The Dreamers," arrive in *Underlight* as nearly spectral visitors whose physical counterparts lie in peaceful slumber in the real world—which means the question of "What is *Underlight*?" is usually answered by other players with a cryptic "Whatever you want it to be." Witty and obtuse, it is an answer that doesn't feed the hunger of the question. This is the essence of *Underlight*. The world of *Underlight* is a seemingly endless series of rooms with portals every 20 feet that lead to more rooms full of portals. Some of the rooms are "outside" but even these have the feel of a tiny room with a few walls missing. I'd love to critique the musical content, but as it was available only by downloading an additional plug-in, I opted to play with the default beeps and whistles.

I found *Underlight* both fun and frustrating at the same time, but the shame of it is that the parts I found frustrating are the things I often chide "kids these days" for criticizing.

The greatest feature *Underlight* has to offer is its players: They are passionate and they love to share that passion.



The point of *Underlight* seems to be going through these portals to rooms with more portals to go through to rooms with more portals...oh, and chatting.

more you see, the more it slowly begins to make sense to you.

It is a game of discovery, and its cast of players is more than happy to play along with the mystery as they lead you deeper down the rabbit hole. Other online games offer little more than frustration and shattered hopes to newbies, but in my experience, the greatest feature *Underlight* has to offer is its players. They are passionate about the game and they love to share that passion on with new Dreamers.

Although the community within *Underlight* outclasses those of all other online games, it is here that its superiority begins and ends. The graphics are reminiscent of *Doom*, only the maps are much smaller. The world of *Underlight* is a seemingly endless series of rooms with portals every 20 feet that lead to more rooms full of portals. Some of the rooms are "outside" but even these have the feel of a tiny room with a few walls missing. I'd love to critique the musical content, but as it was available only by downloading an additional plug-in, I opted to play with the default beeps and whistles.

I found *Underlight* both fun and frustrating at the same time, but the shame of it is that the parts I found frustrating are the things I often chide "kids these days" for criticizing.

Underlight has the depth and story that most online games lack. Games like *EverQuest* and *Dark Age of Camelot* arguably tend to put pictures and sounds ahead of game content, and here I have what I've always asked for: a good game that focuses more on the gameplay and the experience than the pretty view. And what do I do with it? I shrug my shoulders and say, "It looks like *Doom*." A game like *Underlight* deserves better than me.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

A fun and interesting chat room with graphics, barely.

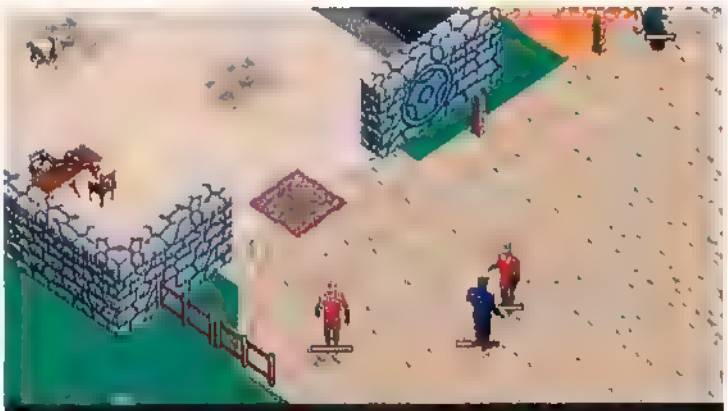
Geneforge

A shareware game that the big boys could learn from By Jeff Green

PUBLISHER Spiderweb Software DEVELOPER Spiderweb Software GENRE Role-playing URL www.spiderwebsoftware.com ESRB RATING None PRICE $25.00

REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 200, 30MB RAM, 25MB hard drive space RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS Pentium II or better MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT None

The great thing about shareware games is that the people who make them do so because they really like games. Jeff Vogel, the man behind Spiderweb Software, has been creating humble but highly entertaining shareware RPGs for a number of years now. These games tend to deliver on two elements that the big companies with their multimillion dollar budgets often forget to include: story and gameplay. *Geneforge*, Vogel's latest game, does it again. While it obviously can't hold a candle in the looks department to any of the state-of-the-art big budget RPGs like *Morrowind* and *Neverwinter Nights*, it offers a fun, satisfying gaming experience to those who understand what they're getting into.



Geneforge's graphics won't win any awards, but this shareware RPG has a great plot and better-than-average gameplay.

The pathfinding is better than in most of the "professional" games I've played in a year.

This time around, Vogel mixes classic fantasy with a Philip K. Dick-style sci-fi twist. You start out as a "shaper," a member of a magical guild that has the power to create creatures and objects to do their bidding. You've crash-landed on a shapers' island, but all of the shapers are missing, and the creations themselves have taken over. Some are still loyal to the shapers, but others want to declare independence and are hostile to you. What happened on the island, and what's going to happen now that you've arrived, are the game's big mysteries. It's a better story than most RPGs ever come up with.

There are three classes to choose from at the start—shaper, guardian, and agent. The shapers are strongest at creating creatures, guardians focus on melee combat, and agents specialize in combat magic. But as you level up, you can have any class learn any skill, so you can mix and match as best suits you. I played as a guardian but leveled up my shaping skills enough that I was able to create fairly strong creatures to fight alongside me.

Combat is turn-based, and every time I was on the verge of declaring the game "too easy," I'd find myself dead. The AI of both enemies and your NPC creatures is smart, and the pathfinding is seriously better than in most of the "professional" games I've played in a year. The interface is also nice (though a bit too green) with a great map screen that lets you travel to any of the game's 77 areas that you've visited already. The story is basically told through text screens—but it's good text. And, as in all good RPGs, how you react to the NPCs and whom you align with factor significantly in how the story turns out (I tried it with multiple saves).

Remember, this is shareware. It's a small game with modest requirements, perfect for laptop gaming. Keep your expectations down, and you'll have a good time with *Geneforge*.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

A small, shareware RPG that delivers on plot and gameplay, though you have to put up with dated graphics.

BCT Commander

A great concept horribly executed By John Fletcher

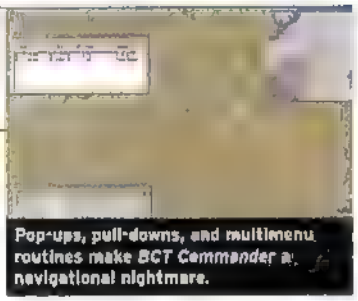
PUBLISHER Shrapnel Games DEVELOPER ProSIM Company URL www.prosimco.com ESRB RATING Not rated PRICE $39.95

REQUIREMENTS Pentium 133, 16MB RAM, 30MB hard drive space RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS 32MB RAM MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT Modem, LAN (2 players)

BCT Commander is a textbook example of how to ruin a worthwhile game. It tries to merge the realism of U.S. Army wargame sims with the playability of commercial games. But *BCT* fails so dismally at playability that the realism doesn't matter.

BCT is unabashedly cerebral. It focuses on teaching U.S. ground combat theory at the task force level, stressing topics like how to build a zone of engagement or achieve battlefield mass. But it fails to make its uncompromisingly complex material accessible, intelligible, or even correct. The manual—for once crucial to learning a game—is printed in microscopic six-point type and presents utterly useless examples of play in eye-scorching inverted grayscale. The operational orders detailing each mission are so riddled with typos, irrelevant material, and misinformation that they border on gibberish.

Within the game itself, poor interface routines, tiny graphics, and inefficient information delivery make for an ergonomic nightmare. For example, line-of-sight is critical in this game. *BCT* layers its topographic maps over a uniformly brown background with no incline or decline indicators. You determine LOS by a bizarre routine of selecting a unit or waypoint while holding down both mouse buttons and dragging the cursor over the part of the map you want to examine. And that's just one example.

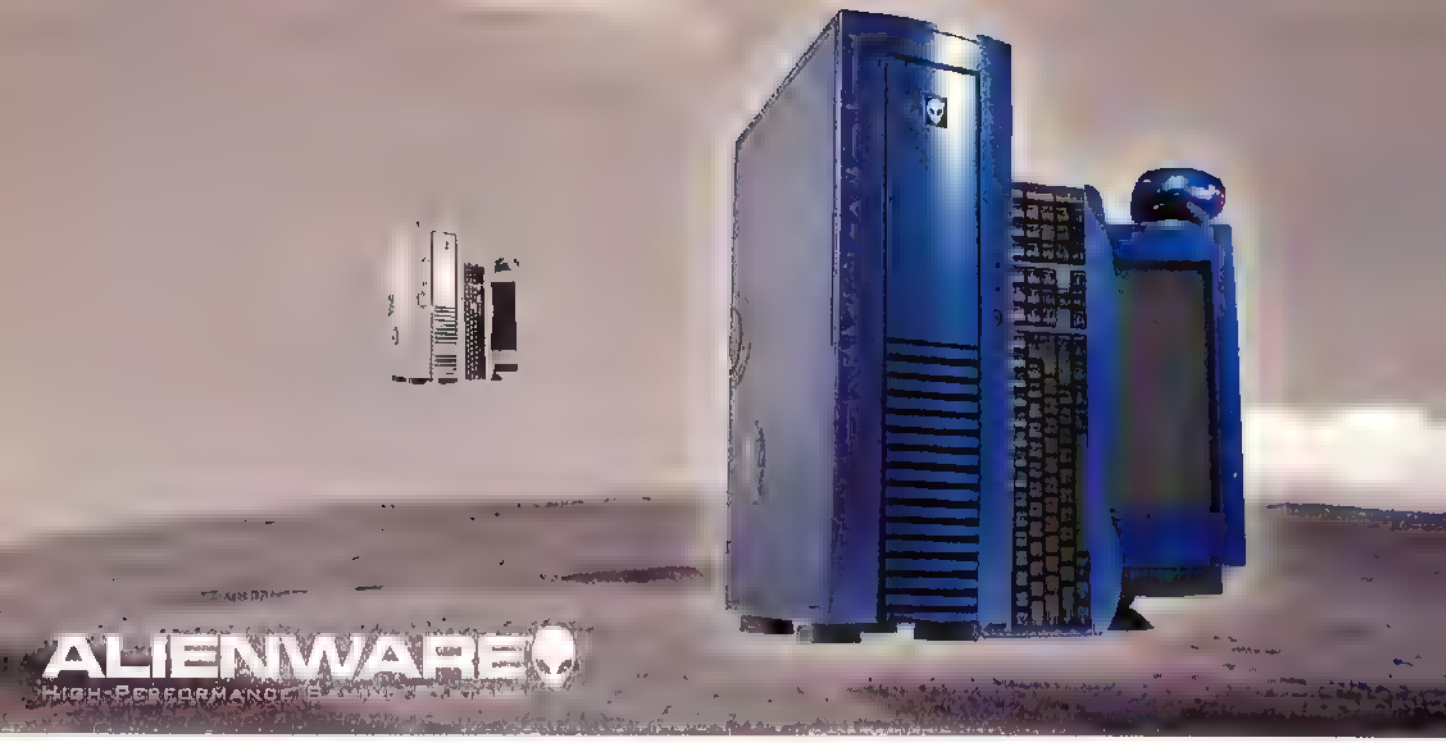


Pop-ups, pull-downs, and multimenu routines make *BCT Commander* a navigational nightmare.

ProSIM had the right goal, but unfortunately *BCT*'s best use is as an example of what not to do next time around.

VERDICT ★½☆☆☆

***BCT Commander* is more learning tool than game and more headache than fun.**



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Tech

The best ways to part with your hard-earned money Edited by William O'Neal

Too Much of a Good Thing? ever!

Ten 5.1 and 4.1 speaker systems square off in a battle the likes of which not even the Octagon has seen

By Raphael Liberatore

Photography by Arnold Gonzalo

Gamers looking to enhance their surround-sound experience are in for a serious treat. We got our hands on 10 4.1 and 5.1 speaker systems, and most of them achieved high scores on the key performance characteristics of tonality, imaging, bass, and dynamic range. Some performed better than others, but we're pleased to say that there wasn't a dog in the bunch, which demonstrates how much computer speakers have matured over the past few years.

To put the speakers through their paces, I equipped myself with a Sound Level Meter, Monster brand digital and analog cables, and two top-of-the-line Alienware rigs sporting 5.1 Creative Labs Audigy and Hercules Game Theater XP sound cards. My test media included a wide range of music CDs and MP3s, Dolby Digital, THX, and DTS capable DVDs from *Saving Private Ryan* and *Fantasia 2000* to *Dances with Wolves*. Of course, the true test was in how the speakers performed with our favorite-sounding games: *Medal of Honor, Counter-Strike, NASCAR 4, Unreal Tournament, Myth III,* and *Aliens vs. Predator 2*. And, lest we forget, the price for performance was also taken into account.

Some speakers rocked in just pure sound performance, while others offered nifty features beyond the standard fare. The speakers got their final ratings according to how well the manufacturers married performance, features, and price.

ONE OF THE CLASSIER-LOOKING speaker systems, the Altec Lansing 641 produces exceptional sound quality with a full, dynamic range. From clear highs and smooth midrange to deep, throbbing bass, the 641 does justice to music CDs, MP3s, DVDs, and games. In his collaboration with the contemporary jazz group Fourplay, Phil Collins' raspy voice sounded tight alongside detailed horns and percuss on. Despite the lack of a center channel speaker, dialogue from the DVD *Almost Famous* projected a center channel sound well. And in gaming? The 641 excelled at conveying the thunderous explosions and hissing rounds flying overhead during the Omaha Beach landing in *Medal of Honor*. At just $199, this 4.1 speaker system is a no-brainer.

MONSOON'S MM-2000 SYSTEM sports very cool-looking, flat-panel speakers with d pole radiating magnetic transducer technology, which produces qua ity audio and broadens a speaker's sweet spot. The satellite stands are a bit flimsy, but these speakers are superb for music, offering natural, dynamic sound. In a recording of Mozart, for example, the detailed, crisp strings were well conveyed with the orchestra's other ambient mid- to high-frequency instruments. Spatial characteristics are also good, especially with surround-sound games and DVDs. During the heavy battle scenes in *Gladiator* and *The Patriot*, the MM-2000 produced solid imaging across four satel ites, with channel localization bordering on phenomenal. During heavy gaming sessions w th *Counter-Strike* and *MechWarrior 4*, the passive subwoofer produced c ean, wel -defined bass. At extreme levels, however, the MM-2000's bass lacks the room-shaking abilities of the Klipsch or Altec Lansing systems. But generally, it's right on par with the others.

PACKED WITH TONS OF HEART-pounding muscle, the Logitech Z-560 speakers' sleek, sophisticated look would be at home in a NASA space station. Even the SoundTouch contro system dials are illum nated in cool neon blue and green. The Z-560 subwoofer performed Paul Van Dyke and Vengaboys with almost as much strength and depth as the more powerful and more expensive Klipsch ProMedia 4.1. But although music clarity is generally good, slight tonal blurr ng and unevenness mar the midrange frequencies. Steely Dan vocals were flat, while the string sections of Bach's adagios lacked definition. On the upside, DVD playback was close to perfection. The THX-certified satellites offered strong sonic detail and imaging during the opening sequence of *Dances with Wolves*. The Z-560 is really built for gaming. The 3D positioning was loud and detailed in both *Ghost Recon* and *NASCAR 4*. If you're gaming on a lean wallet, then the Z-560 system is the perfect choice.

KLIPSCH IS ALL ABOUT RAW ENERGY AND POWER. The deep, thunderous bass of a Redeemer rocket explosion produced by the Klipsch subwoofer is second to none for gaming. Of course, the system is powered by 400 watts, so anything less would be disappo nting. This 4.1 THX certified system defines bass frequencies, and Klipsch has tweaked the midrange so music comes across sounding smooth and natural. During a Shelf eld Drive mix, Clair Marlo's vocals conveyed clean and vibrant tones, with just a slight dullness at h gher frequencies. DVD playback offers great spatial characteristics, good imaging, and clear vocals. At $299, this set is not the cheapest of the bunch. But there's nothing else that comes close to its power in creating bass.

S4 MIDILAND 8200 V2.0

MONSOON MH-505

▲ LOOKING AS IF THEY BELONG IN a home theater, MidLand's revamped 8200 speakers define style and elegance in computer speakers. Tonality is smooth, with higher-than-normal resolution and dispersion throughout. DVDs played perfectly, with great imaging and sound stage presence. A DTS recording of Don Henley's "End of Innocence" conveyed a warm, natural sound with good depth and transient response coming from matching satellites. Even though the subwoofer is a mere 100 watts, bass was thunderous and exaggerated in games like *Quake III: Arena* and *AVP2*. What makes the MidiLand 8200 special is that it is one of the few 5.1 speaker systems sporting a decoder capable of handling Dolby Digital, Dolby Pro Logic, DTS, and analog. It offers a multitude of input options and surround-sound modes and makes full use of the performance and features of digital technology. If you're a true surround-sound aficionado, then the 8200 is worth the hefty price.

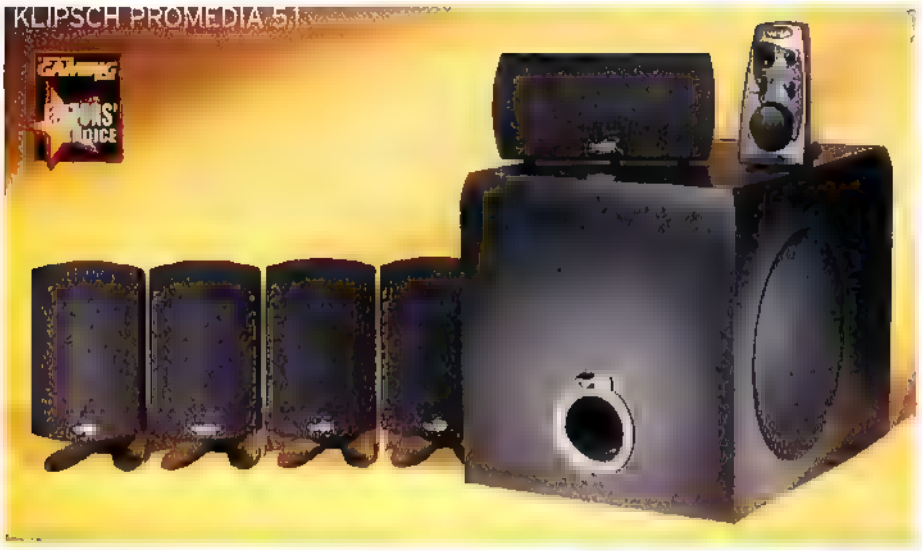
HERCULES XPS 510

▲ THE HERCULES XPS 510 SPEAKERS ARE ABOUT AS streamlined as computer speakers can be and still perform. At $89, this set should be on everyone's desk as a backup. And sound is surprisingly decent for budget speakers. These little cubes sustain decent highs and midrange frequencies with smooth ambient sound. But music vocals displayed varying coloration and zipped highs. Don't expect groundbreaking bass. Subwoofer performance was above average, especially during frag sessions of *Quake III: Arena* and *Half-Life: Counter-Strike*, but distortion crept in at middle to loud volumes. Those jonesing for a surround-sound speaker system but having very little pocket change will find that these cubes do the job. The Hercules XPS 510 goes well above the performance-to-price bar.

▲ LIKE THE MM-2000, THE MH-505 system sports flat-panel speakers with dipole-radiating magnetic transducer technology. Basically, this means voices sound natural, with a stronger hint of presence in music than DVDs. When playing Debussy's piano works, the MH-505 offered silky smooth sound, conveying nice imaging and detail. At loud volume, high-energy tracks from The Rippingtons and Van Halen retained clarity and solid tonality. DVDs also sound good, but some channel localization hiccups occurred at the center channel when Maximus took on the gladiator champion Titus of Gaul. The MH-505 rendered this scene with less coherence than it did music and games. Still, during the final battle with Moagim in *Myth III*, sonic detail and 3D imaging were clean. For those looking for music speakers at a fair price, the MH-505 may be the ticket.

POLK AUDIO AMR130

◀ NOT A TECHIE? NO WORRIES. Setting up this 5.1 speaker system is a piece of cake. Everything is color coded and labeled for quick and simple connection. The center channel comfortably rests on top of any monitor. When it comes to music, these speakers rock. From Billy Idol and Led Zeppelin to Moby and Stravinsky, the AMR130 delivered a smooth, durable frequency response and good neutral tones. The system also maintained speaker imaging while playing DVDs and games. During the Japanese bombing sequence of *Pearl Harbor*, explosions were heavy but not room jarring. The same was true for *Max Payne*. The subwoofer delivers decent exaggerated lows at normal levels, but cranking up the bass results in distortion. What do you expect from a 40 watt sub? For only $169, the AMR130 is a keeper if you're musically inclined and financially challenged.



THE KLIPSCH PROMEDIA 5.1 system offers performance similar to that of its 4.1 sibling but has a center channel speaker and more raw power in order to compete in the 5.1 arena. Sound stage presence and dynamic range are fantastic, with crisp-sounding mids and lows along with its ultradeep but clear bass. Gaming is sublime, with 3D spatial characteristics well defined—I cranked up the volume during a game of *Half-Life: Blue Shift*, and the walls actually shook. The speakers give DVDs the imaging and sonic characteristics they deserve. During music playback, however, highs are muted and overpowered by the sub, especially with the volume cranking at full tilt. Although it lacks digital connectivity inputs—which essentially means it lacks true DTS and Dolby Digital—the ProMedia 5.1, even at its high price, comes close to perfection.

YET ANOTHER FINE SPEAKER SYSTEM FROM THE Cambridge SoundWorks family, the MegaWorks 510D sounds truly magnificent. It not only possesses one of the highest wattage ratings (a whopping 500) of the systems in this roundup, it also offers a digital input for Audigy sound cards, a low-ring Dolby Digital performance. The 510D's smooth and detailed midrange, excellent transient response, and stereo imaging are particularly noticeable in music. Tonal balance is good, though highs seem a bit dull. A couple of tracks from the Dixie Chicks came across poised and natural with good sonic detail throughout. Same thing with DVDs—having the digital input really allows the MegaWorks to convey discrete sounds and high-resolution effects from movies like *Jurassic Park III* and *The Matrix*. Gamewise the MegaWorks rocked, with incredible dynamic range and spatial imaging. Even the quality and depth of bass response is on par with Klipsch's ProMedia line. If you're serious about getting a great-sounding system, the MegaWorks 510D makes an excellent choice.

By the Numbers

PRODUCT	PRICE	SYSTEM POWER	FEATURES	VERDICT
Altec Lansing 641 www.alteclansing.com	$199	200 total watts RMS, subwoofer, 100 watts, satellites, 25 watts each	4.1 (analog inputs), headphone and auxiliary input jack; remote control	★★★★½
Logitech Z-560 www.logitech.com	$199	400 total watts RMS, subwoofer, 188 watts, satellites, 53 watts each	4.1 (analog inputs); Soundtouch Control Center; THX certified; two-year limited warranty	★★★★☆
Klipsch ProMedia 4.1 www.klipsch.com	$299	400 total watts RMS; subwoofer, 160 watts, satellites, 60 watts each	4.1 (analog inputs), THX certified; LED master control; amplified headphone jack; music player input	★★★★½
Monsoon MM-2000 www.monsoonspeakers.com	$299	340 total watts, subwoofer, 100 watts, satellites, 60 watts each	4.1 (analog inputs); master control; dipole-radiating magnetic transducer technology, amplified headphone jack	★★★★½
S4 MidiLand 8200 v2.0 www.midiland.com	$399	200 watts RMS; subwoofer, 100 watts, satellites, 20 watts each	5.1 (digital and analog inputs); Dolby Digital and DTS decoder; remote control	★★★★½
Monsoon MM-505 www.monsoonspeakers.com	$179	85 total watts RMS	5.1 (analog inputs); master control volume; dipole-radiating high-frequency transducer; amplified headphone jack	★★★½☆
Polk Audio AMR130 www.polkaudio.com	$169	240 total watts	5.1 (analog inputs), master volume control	★★★½☆
Hercules XPS 510 www.hercules.com	$89	60 watts RMS, subwoofer, 20 watts, five satellites, 8 watts each	5.1 (analog), three-year warranty	★★★½☆
Creative Labs Cambridge SoundWorks MegaWorks 510D www.creative.com	$350	500 total watts RMS; subwoofer, 150 RMS; satellites, 70 watts RMS each	5.1 (digital and analog inputs), master volume control; remote control	★★★★½
Klipsch ProMedia 5.1 www.klipsch.com	$399	500 watts RMS	5.1 (analog inputs); THX certified; LED master control; amplified headphone jack; music player input	★★★★½

Hewlett-Packard Pavilion 761n

Hot little system just waiting for a graphics card upgrade By Ken Feinstein

[illegible]
Hewlett-Packard
[illegible] www.hp.com
[illegible] $1,500
[illegible] $1,800

With the endless parade of oversized "killer gaming rigs" passing through the *CGW* labs, HP's pint-sized Pavilion 761n comes as a pleasant alternative. The integrated graphics on the nForce-based motherboard lack punch, but upgrade it with a proper graphics card and this system can go toe-to-toe with its bulkier brethren.

The 761n measures only 15.75 inches high, 8.27 inches wide, and 15.75 inches deep. HP conserves space by using Nvidia's nForce 420 chipset, which offers integrated GeForce2 MX graphics, excellent 3D audio, and ethernet networking. Combined with AMD's 1.67GHz Athlon XP 2000+ CPU and 512MB of DDR memory, it's a system with serious potential.

Unfortunately, those tired GeForce2 MX graphics don't do justice to that leading-edge CPU. It delivered only 48 frames per second running *Quake III* at 1024x786 (32-bit) and eked out a low score of 2301 on 3DMark2001 SE Professional. Fortunately, the system has an empty AGP slot just waiting for a power boost. Plugging in a VisionTek GeForce4 Ti 4000 card made all the difference. Then the HP made *Quake III* work at 188fps, and its score of 9312 on 3DMark2001 puts it in the upper echelon of game machines.

Those tired GeForce2 MX graphics don't do justice to the leading-edge Athlon XP 2000+ CPU.

Benchmarks

	nForce 32MB GeForce2 MX	Nvidia GeForce4 Ti 4000
Quake III: Arena 1024x768x16	73	192.2
Quake III: Arena 1024x768x32	48	188
Quake III: Arena 1600x1200x32	N/A	N/A
Unreal Tournament 1024x768x16	55	64
Expendable 1024x768x16	67	113
Expendable 1024x768x32	41	111
Re-Volt 1024x768x16	119	266
Re-Volt 1024x768x32	74	267
Re-Volt 1600x1200x32	N/A	N/A
Serious Sam: TSE 1024x768x16	57	139
Serious Sam: TSE 1024x768x32	36	137
Serious Sam: TSE 1600x1200x32	N/A	N/A
Geomean (GameGauge) Score	61	150
Ziff Davis 3DWinMark2001	60	274
MadOnion.com 3DMark2001 SE 1024x768x32	2,301	9,312
MadOnion.com 3DMark2001 SE 1600x1200x32	N/A	N/A
MadOnion.com SYSmark2002 Rating 1024x768x32	167	171
MadOnion.com SYSmark2002 Internet Content Creation 1024x768x32	1,000	211
MadOnion.com SYSmark2002 Office Productivity 1024x768x32	138	138

Other than the graphics card, HP didn't skimp on the system. It has a 16X DVD ROM drive, a 24X/10X CD-RW drive, and a generous 80GB hard drive to handle storage. Inside the system you'll find three PCI slots, one filled with a FireWire card, one with a 56kbps modem, and a third one open. Two USB ports and one FireWire port are conveniently located on the front of the case, and the keyboard includes handy controls for audio and DVD playback, Internet access, and so on.

The test system came equipped with HP's f50 15 inch LCD monitor, which displays bright, clear text and graphics at 1024x768 resolution. I'm a big fan of LCDs—not only are they smaller and lighter than CRTs, they're also much easier on the eyes because they don't have the flicker factor that plagues CRTs (which is especially bad if their refresh rate isn't set high enough).

Following the space-saving theme, HP includes two very small Polk Audio speakers with the system, sans subwoofer. These dinky little things provided a surprisingly full and clear sound, thanks in part to the nForce's outstanding audio quality. But anyone serious about music or who likes to feel the rumble of their game audio will need to upgrade to a more robust speaker set.

HP bundles a good array of software with the Pavilion, including video editing software, the Microsoft Works applications suite, Microsoft Money and Quicken financial software, and Encarta. It also comes with McAfee's VirusScan, but you'll get only 90 days of free updates. The system has a one-year limited warranty and HP offers phone tech support 24/7.

At $1,800 with the 15-inch LCD, the HP Pavilion 761n is no screaming bargain, especially considering that you'll probably want to upgrade the graphics card the moment you get it home. With a better graphics card, though, the system's small size and complete set of features earn it an honored place on a gamer's desktop.

★★★½☆

Just upgrade the graphics card and this little system can play with the [illegible].

Creative Labs NOMAD Jukebox 3

Is that your entire music collection in your pocket or are you just happy to see me? By Christopher Null

VENDOR: Creative Labs
URL: www.nomadworld.com
PRICE: $400

SPECIFICATIONS: 200MHz or faster PC with USB or FireWire port, Windows 98/ME/2000/XP, a whole lot of music

For a couple of years, high-capacity MP3 jukeboxes have been the only way to cart multiggs of music around with you. But jamming a hard drive into a Walkman isn't exactly pocket friendly. Case in point: The original NOMAD Jukebox was a monster at 14 ounces of silver plastic and transistors.

But thanks to the miracle of nanotechnology, Creative has managed to squeeze all that magic into 10.2 amazing ounces! What, not impressed? Well, hard drives aren't getting any smaller, and considering all the features the company has crammed into this *almost*-pocket-sized music player, it's tough to not peg the NOMAD Jukebox 3 as the best portable money can buy. (Although at $400 you might be postponing an upgrade or two if you decide to shell out for one.)

If you're familiar with the NOMAD Jukebox 20GB, you'll find this version just a little bit better. The 20GB capacity remains, along with the EAX equalizer, a USB port, multifile format support, and dual line-out jacks for connecting to quad-speaker rigs. But the new stuff is what's worth the extra cash: 1394 FireWire input for much faster down loads (I clocked 100 megs of music at 24 seconds), a rechargeable lithium-ion battery (triple the battery life of the original 20GB juke), and a slightly improved operating system that you tool around with a new jog dial. Note I said *slightly* improved: it's still aggravating to manage 5,000 or so tunes on such a small screen, and sadly, the USB connection isn't version 2.0.

Should you be inclined, you can bypass your PC and record directly to the juke through an analog/optical jack, in case you want to rip CDs from the listening station at Tower. Not that we would ever, ever condone such a thing.

The bottom line is that this player has just about everything you'll want in a portable—at least until the 40GB version (for $499.99) hits the street this summer.

VERDICT

The state of the art in portable music, but OS quirks are nagging, and where's USB 2.0?

WIL POWER

By William O'Neal

Being a Technical Editor Can Be Hazardous...to Your Career!

This morning began like so many others I've had here at *CGW*: I staggered in at around 10:30, took an Alka-Seltzer Morning Relief, pondered the techno-gadget heap of junk that is my office, received my daily foot massage from Chim-Chim, and turned on my machine. Well into my second game of Yahoo Dominos (a game so addictive that I've joined a 12-step group to help me kick the habit), Bill Schmelzer—Ziff-Davis' version of Nick Burns, *Saturday Night Live*'s "Company Computer Guy"—came into my office shaking his index finger at me Mutumbo-style.

"Uh-oh," I thought. "It's first thing in the morning...this ain't gonna be good."

"Did you give Che Chou (of *Electronic Gaming Monthly*) a DLink router?"

"Uh, yeah," I sheepishly replied. "Why?"

"Well," Bill began, "that router has built-in DHCP. And as you well know, we use DHCP here."

So I knew what was coming next. The DLink router I had given Che had initiated an all-out battle for network supremacy with Ziff's "official" DHCP server, in the process rendering dozens of people's network connections useless.

Fortunately, Bill's a smart guy, and quickly surmised that an act this heinous could have and would have been perpetrated by only one person—me. He disconnected the router and brought it to me, and then proceeded to tout the router's numerous capabilities. He concluded the conversation with "Anyway, I was wondering if I could have this router?" followed by "And I could also use another copy of Windows XP."

Seeing that he had me over the proverbial barrel, and considering that he was pretty cool about the whole thing, I was more than happy to share a little swag with him.

Tech Medics

You've got questions; we've got answers **By William O'Neal**

Chasing Squirrels

It is pretty much an obsession for me to have the fastest machine. Currently I am running a P4 TE ASUS motherboard with 512MB RDRAM, an Xtasy 5864 video card, and two 60GB Western Digital hard drives in a RAID configuration. I have heard that if I upgrade my motherboard to a system that will run DDR RAM, I might squeeze some more juice outta my computer. But is it going to be worth the money to switch to a new motherboard and RAM just for a little extra speed? I can't control this urge to always spend my hard-earned paycheck to upgrade my computer. What the hell is wrong with me? Sometimes I feel as if I am chasing squirrels.

David S.

I've never chased a squirrel before. My great-uncle Buster would "hunt" them when we were out fishing and put 'em in a stew when we got home (I'm so glad I'm not country like that). But I digress. Judging by your mobo, I'd say you're running a 1.6GHz or 1.8GHz P4. If you upgraded your mobo to one that supports DDR memory, your system would probably be a little faster, but so what. Do you really want to go through all that trouble to get 180fps in *Quake III* instead of 170?

Detonated

My computer came with a 32MB Nvidia GeForce2 MX graphics card with TV-out. I recently installed Windows XP and later noticed that there were no drivers for my graphics card. I went to Nvidia's Website and saw that there were several drivers available for download. Do I need to download and install new drivers?

Rick Besse

If your system is working well, I wouldn't do anything. But if it's not behaving as you think it should, go to Nvidia's Website and download the latest Detonator drivers for XP.

To LCD or Not to LCD

Man, I understand everyone wants the best, but who can really drop $3,000 on a computer? I doubt that three-quarters of your readers can (I know I can't). You profess to be a Democrat, so step up and review some computers around $1,500–take care of the working man.

Question. Are flat screens worth the extra money? Gateway and Dell are selling them for not much more than the CRT version. I think you have done a great job with the hardware section. I have been reading computer magazines since 1993 and CGW has not missed a beat the entire time. Now that other guy at your biggest competition, he bugs the sh** out of me.

Michale Griffiths

Good point about the $1,500 computer story–I'm definitely due to review some affordable machines. As for the flat screen, I have to suggest that you pass and just get a CRT. Most flat screens don't scale well to anything other than their native resolutions. In other words, an LCD that's designed to run at 1280x1024 will look fuzzy when you run a game at 800x600.

Which Microphone to Buy?

The microphones that ship with modern PCs are pretty austere. When you record your voice, they often pick up background noise, make an electronic hum, and have an uneven response over the range of frequencies that make up a human voice. Further, I've found that the "sweet spot" for recording (distance from the microphone [at which sounds are] close enough to be heard but not so close that breath and other unwanted sounds are picked up) is tight enough to be a nuisance. Surely there is something on the market that can do better for less than $300.

Mimb81

Says Dave Salvator: "One option would be a Plantronics headset that uses Andrea Technologies' noise reduction. They do a good job of reducing ambient noise. As for the hum, I don't know what would cause it other than a blown mic diaphragm (resist the urge to make pregnant-mic jokes here...). Check www.andreaelectronics.com/Buy/ProductDesc/ANC550.htm. The headsets cost about $35 and solve both problems–sweet-spotting and ambient noise."

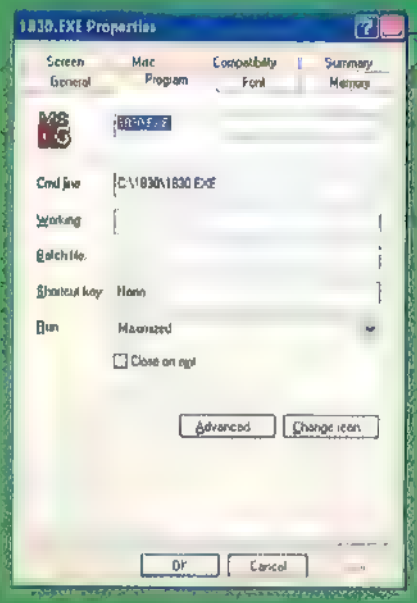
"Who can really drop $3,000 on a computer?"

ILLUSTRATION BY A SAD SAP

How To: Get DOS Games to Work

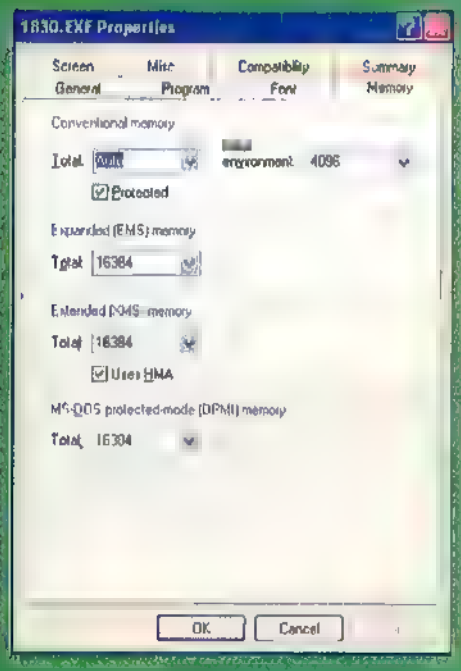
Time to dig out those coasters for some old-school gaming By T. Byrl Baker

Windows XP is getting better at handling old games thanks to new drivers, but what about that stack of DOS discs you just can't get to run anymore? Following these tips should let you play most of those old-school classics. (Note: Be sure to click "Apply" after changing any settings or they won't stick.)



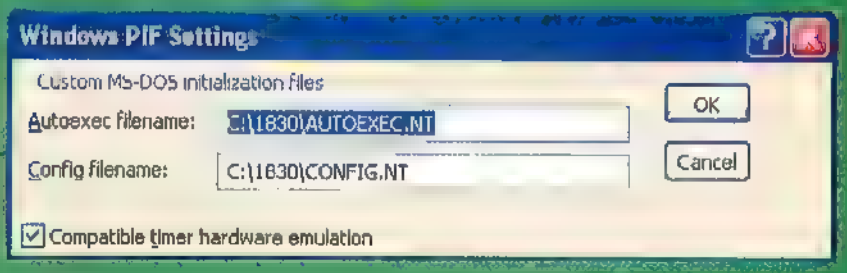
STEP #1

GET ERROR MESSAGES TO STICK When I tried to test an old copy of Avalon Hill's *1830: Railroads & Robber Barons*, the game refused to load. And the error message box popped up and disappeared so quickly that it was impossible to read the text to find out what needed to be fixed. If you are having this problem, right-click on the executable, click on Properties, and select the Program tab. Clear the "Close on exit" check box and the DOS window will stay open when the error is generated.



STEP #2

MANAGE YOUR MEMORY In my case improperly configured memory was the main problem (common for many DOS programs that are hungry for conventional memory, EMS, or XMS). To fix this problem, open the program's executable Properties window and select the Memory tab. You may need to experiment, but generally setting everything to the highest available value in the drop-down menus works best. Check the "Protected" and "Uses HMA" boxes for good measure. You may need to create custom config.sys and autoexec.bat files to make the rogue program recognize some of the memory settings. We'll deal with that next.



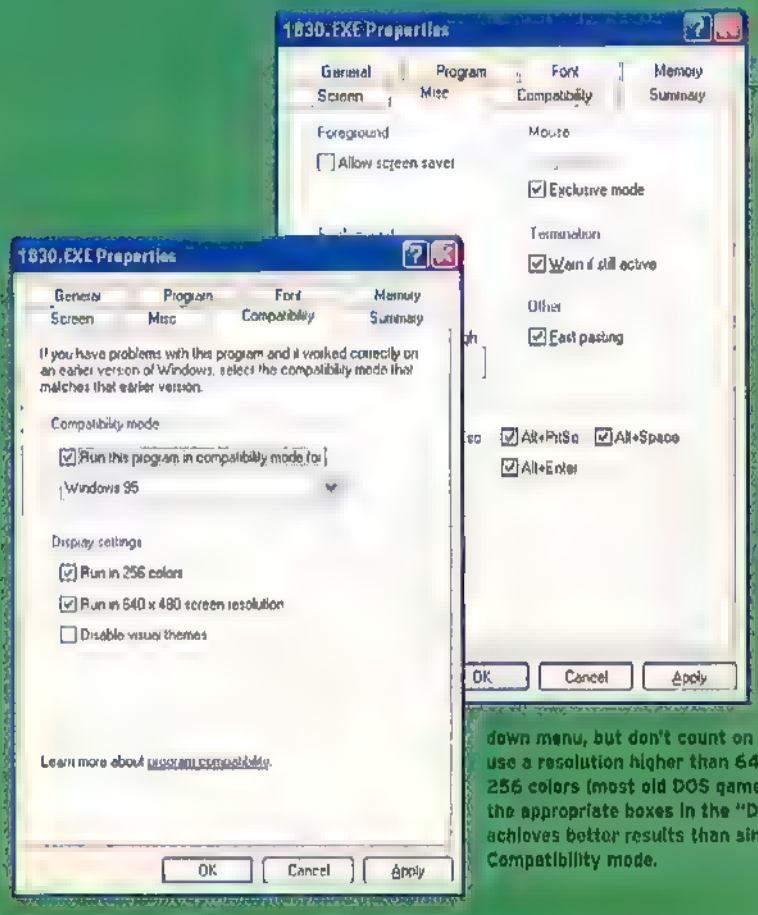
STEP #3

CUSTOM CONFIGS Windows XP makes it easy to create custom files for each DOS program installed on your computer. Just head to C:\Windows\system32 and look for the CONFIG.NT and AUTOEXEC.NT files, and copy (don't move) both of them into the folder containing the executable for the DOS program you are trying to fix. Open the DOS executable's Properties window again, select the Program tab, click on the Advanced button, and put the full paths for the custom AUTOEXEC.NT and CONFIG.NT in the appropriate boxes.

Note that there is a check box here for "Compatible timer hardware emulation." If you get an old game working but it runs too fast, try checking this box to slow it down. A utility like Mo'Slo (www.hpaa.com/moslo) works better, but checking the time box got *1830* to run properly and didn't cost an extra dime.

Once you have the executable looking in the right place, you can modify the files, using installation guides that came with the DOS software or custom settings of your own. In most cases, you need do very little beyond opening CONFIG.NT with a text editor such as Notepad and inserting the line "emm=ram" (without the quotes) somewhere after the "dos=high,umb" line.

on WindowsXP



STEP #4

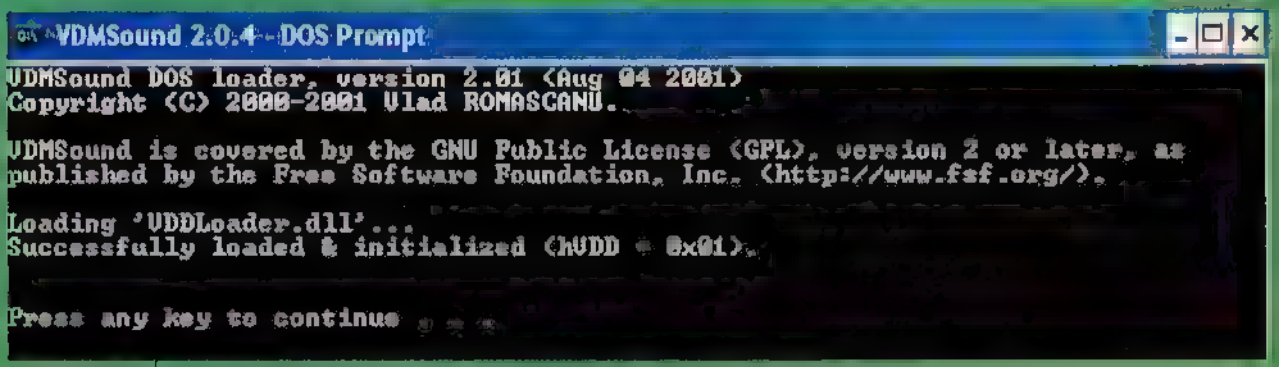
MORE PROPERTIES TWEAKING

The steps outlined above were enough to get rid of our memory error, but 1830 still crashed soon after it loaded the title screen.

Making a few more adjustments in the Properties menu got it running smoothly. Here's how:

First, choose the Program tab and select Maximized in the Run box. DOS games don't like to run in a window, so that can help. Now select the Screen tab and click on the Full-screen radio button before moving on to the Misc tab. Turn the "Allow screen saver" option off and put the mouse in "Exclusive mode" (move the "Idle Sensitivity" slider to Low if you want it to have better access to CPU resources.

Next up is the largely useless Compatibility tab. Sometimes you can achieve better DOS compatibility by checking the Compatibility mode box and choosing Windows 95 in the drop-down menu, but don't count on it. So if the game is older, doesn't use a resolution higher than 640x480, and doesn't use more than 256 colors (most old DOS games fall into those categories), check the appropriate boxes in the "Display settings" box. This generally achieves better results than simply running the software in Compatibility mode.



STEP #5

[illegible]

Getting sound to work properly is by far the hardest part of running DOS games with Windows XP. By default, the operating system emulates Sound Blaster support using virtual settings of A220, I5, D1, T3, and P330, so select those numbers if the DOS sound configuration program asks you for them. Otherwise everything is fairly automatic, and you may have to disable sound completely to get a stubborn game to work. As a last resort, consider the VDMSound utility (www.ece.mcgill.ca/~vromas/vdmsound), a freeware program designed to make NT-based operating systems more Sound Blaster-friendly. It works with only a limited number of games so far, but compatibility increases with every revision.

Killer Rigs

The best recipe for building your ultimate gaming machine

By William O'Neal

I recently made a day trip to Los Angeles, one of those all-day jaunts when you fly out in the a.m. and get home at 11:00 that night. A truly exhausting experience, the trip was made a bit more tolerable by the fact that Greg Vederman from *PC Gamer* was there, giving me someone to talk shop with.

Among the topics we discussed that day were PR people to whom we've reluctantly given our mobile-phone numbers, graphics cards from companies like Matrox and ATI that—in spite of their best efforts—have yet to dethrone Nvidia's 128MB GeForce4 Ti 4600, and Intel's overwhelming dominance in the CPU marketplace.

I asked Greg if, like me, he gets lambasted by readers for building his version of the Power Rig with Intel CPUs instead of AMD's Athlon XP+ CPUs. "Of course," he replied, "but they're faster." And he's right: The 2.53GHz Pentium 4 (533MHz FSB) CPU that is at the heart of my Power Rig is hands down faster than the fastest CPU from AMD. But at almost $600, it's nearly $300 more than AMD's fastest CPU. And there's the rub.

A good friend emailed this week looking for recommendations on which components to get for the computer he's building. While his first inclination was to go with an Intel CPU, I convinced him to build a machine with an nForce motherboard and an AMD Athlon XP 2100+ CPU. He's not a hardcore gamer and the nForce's 32MB GeForce2 MX graphics card will suit him just fine for the time being, and he can upgrade to a better graphics card when he needs to. The onboard Dolby 5.1 sound means he doesn't have to buy a sound card.

The thing to remember about my Power Rig is that it's the fastest machine I could put together without taking price into consideration. But if I were building a machine with my own money, I'd go with an Athlon XP 2100+.

The Pentium 4 is hands-down faster than the fastest CPU from AMD.

POWER RIG

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Operating System	Windows XP Home Edition	$200
Motherboard	Intel D850MV	$150
Case	Antec Plus660B	$120
Processor	Intel 2.53GHz Pentium 4 (533MHz FSB)	$600
Memory	512MB Samsung PC800 RDRAM	$200
Graphics Card	VisionTek 128MB Nvidia GeForce4 Ti 4600	$400
Monitor	22" NEC MultiSync FE1250+	$700
Hard Drive	120GB IBM DeskStar 7200 rpm	$240
DVD-ROM Drive	Toshiba 16X DVD/48X CD-ROM	$70
CD-RW Drive	Teac 40X/12X/48A	$110
Sound Card	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy X-Gamer	$100
Speakers	Cambridge SoundWorks MegaWorks 510D	$260
Mouse	Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer 3.0	$50
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet Keyboard Pro	$50
TOTAL		$3,250

LEAN MACHINE

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Operating System	Windows XP Home Edition	$200
Motherboard	ASUS A7N266-C nForce	$150
Case	Antec SX-635	$100
Processor	AMD Athlon XP 1800+	$150
Memory	256MB Crucial PC2100 DDR RAM	$120
Graphics Card	64MB VisionTek Nvidia GeForce3 Ti 200	$200
Monitor	19" NEC MultiSync FE950+	$320
Hard Drive	20GB Maxtor D740X Ultra DMA133 7200 rpm	$100
DVD-ROM Drive	Toshiba 16X DVD/48X CD-ROM	$70
CD-RW Drive	N/A	N/A
Sound Card	Onboard nForce 5.1 Audio	N/A
Speakers	Logitech Z-340	$40
Mouse	Microsoft Intellimouse Optical	$40
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet Keyboard Pro	$50
TOTAL		$1,540

You'll believe a mag can fly.

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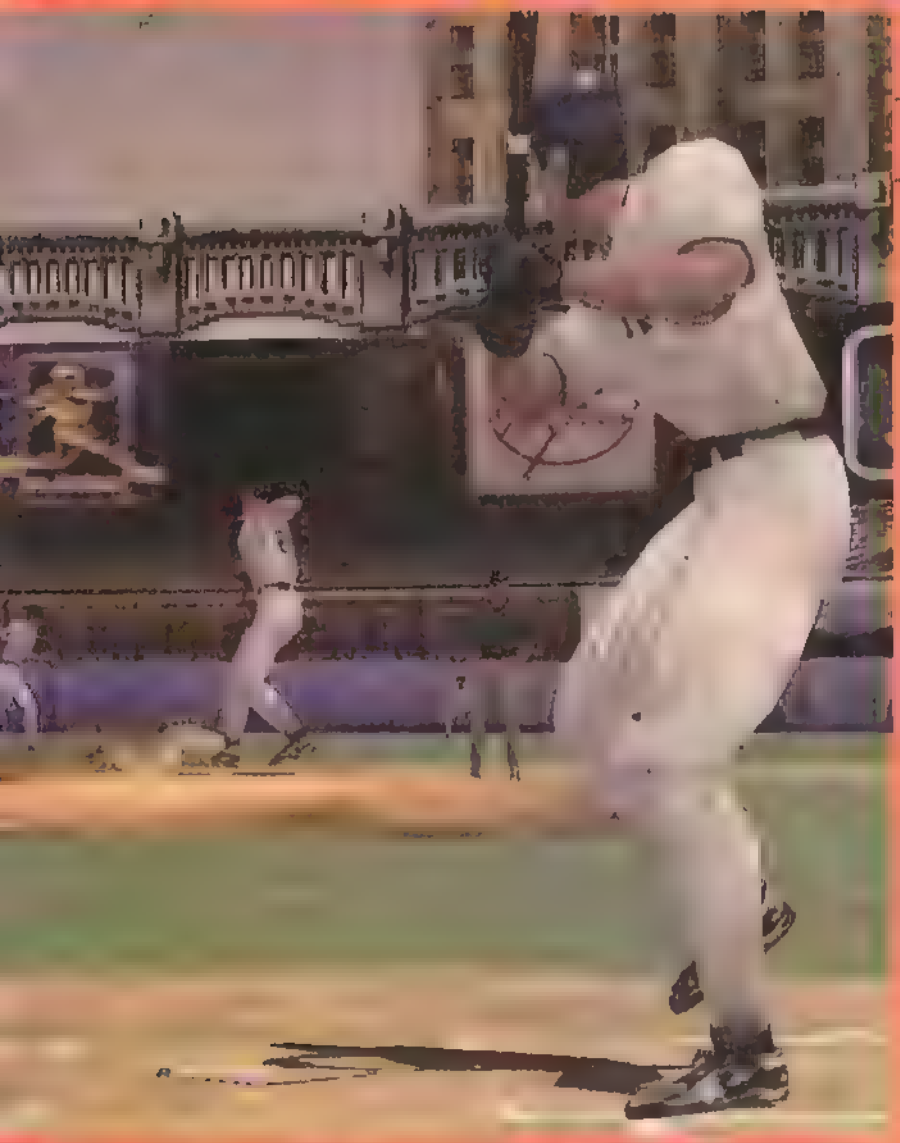


Dirtiest Trick o' the Month

Cool. We got yet another dastardly *Medal of Honor* trick this month, one that combines thievery and deception. Nasty work like this in current games will earn you free loot in this title's *Dungeon Siege*.

I have a dirty trick for *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*. This trick works in multiplayer games, especially team deathmatches. In a level with lots of snipers, you can tell who is shooting by the sound of the gun (the Allies' sniper rifle rumbles, the Axis one cracks). When you kill a sniper, drop your rifle (default H), pick up his, equip it, and pick up your old one for the ammo. You should now have your dead opponent's rifle. Go back to sniping. Your opponents will hear the sound of their team's rifle and won't take cover, making them easy targets.

–Ryan M. Purcell

Ryan, you just snagged yourself the first giveaway copy of *Dungeon Siege*. Now you can start stealing loot from random fantasy critters and be firing a Dragon Minigun instead of an Allied gun. Everyone else, we're still giving away *Dungeon Siege*, so write in a Dirty Trick to claim your own copy.

High Heat 2003

Tuning up the heat By Rob Smoltz

When it comes to the *High Heat* series, there are two things you can count on each year: It will be the best baseball game available for the PC, and it will have plenty of room for improvement. Fortunately, the developers have always given us a way to make those improvements—the tune file allows us to tinker with the actual guts of the game.

In Need of a Tune-Up

If you look in the main directory where you installed *High Heat 2003*, you'll see a small text file called tune.txt. This little file can have a huge impact on your enjoyment of the game, so it pays to learn a bit about how it works. That's what we're here for.

The first thing you should do is make a backup copy of the original file; in case you screw up, you have an easy way to get things back to normal. It also helps to have a reference of which settings you've changed and by how much so that you can fine-tune your adjustments later on. Simply open the tune.txt file and save it under a new name, such as "original.txt." Now if you make a mess of things, you just need to rename this file back to tune.txt, and you're good to go.

The first setting in the tune file is called "base injury chance." As the name implies, here is where you can adjust the frequency with which injuries will occur. I've always been happy with the default setting, but some may find that too many guys get hurt with it, so simply reduce the number to reduce the injuries. Don't get carried away, though; anything less than .005 will be very unrealistic and will result in a league full of Cal Ripken types.

Another important setting in the first section of the tune file is the "park effects." With one quick change, you can give all the stadiums the same characteristics, turning them all into Coors field-style launching pads or pitcher-friendly parks like Dodger Stadium. I recommend changing this setting only if you want to drastically increase or decrease the offensive numbers being produced.

Next up are the wild pitch, passed ball, and balk parameters. I've noticed that all of these situations occur too infrequently in games that I participate in, so I like to bump them up. I increased wild pitches from .05 to .09, passed balls from .0015 to .0065, and balk percentage from .0033 to .0063. Notice that these changes are rather small, but they do make a difference and help to give more realistic numbers at the end of the year. Also note that the numbers I give you are not set in stone, but are a work-in-progress as I continue to play the game. Your mileage may vary, so feel free to make

Continued on page 110

BY BRUCE GERYK AND TOM CHICK

FREEDOM FORCE

EXCLUSIVE STRATEGY GUIDE

GET YOUR COMIC ON

SPEED IS THE KEY FOR ONLINE SUPERHERO SLUGFESTS. THE GAME: FREEDOM FORCE. THE MAP: SMALL TOWN. THE POINT LIMIT FOR CHARACTER BUILDING: 20,000. WORLD DOMINATION GOES TO THE WINNER OF TWO OUT OF THREE MATCHES, EACH FOUGHT WITH A SEPARATE SET OF CUSTOM-MADE HEROES. FREEDOM FORCE HAS SOME STRANGE ASPECTS TO ITS SCORING, SO THE WINNER WILL BE THE LAST MAN STANDING; BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY.

ISSUE #1: SCIENCE VS. SPEED

"I'M NOT A COMIC BOOK FAN, SO I'M GOING TO PLAY THIS LIKE A STRATEGY GAME AND JUST TRY TO OPTIMIZE CHARACTERS FOR COMBAT."

TOM'S HEROES: DR. HYDROCHLORIC AND FOUR EYES

Freedom Force is so unrealistic; all that stuff about Energy X is pure bunk. Everyone knows superheroes get their powers primarily from lab accidents, often associated with beverages. Harvey Schlomo was a mild-mannered scientist who inadvertently put acid in his latte one morning and was transformed into Dr. Hydrochloric. His colleague was the mild-mannered Edward Dullberry, who spilled Diet Dr. Pepper on his keyboard, triggering a resonance cascade scenario that accidentally resulted in a pair of phase-shift glasses. When Dullberry donned the miraculous spectacles, everyone took to calling him Four Eyes. The name stuck.

With his acidic secretions, Dr. Hydrochloric can burn handholds into stone, allowing him to scale buildings (Wall Climbing). As his body is composed of a regenerative acid compound (Stone material type and Fast Healing), he is resistant to acid damage (Neutralize). Being a scientist, Four Eyes also has the Unbeliever resistance to mystical attacks. He attacks with Acid Spray—a medium-magnitude acid beam with long range and high accuracy—or Acid Splash, a long-range, high-accuracy projectile with three impact spawns and a small effect radius. Four Eyes' power resides entirely in his phase-shift glasses, which allow him to look really hard at his foes, even through solid objects (penetrating beams). His stare can shift enemies to another dimension thanks to Phase Out, a powerful beam with purgatory effect; rob them of a random power with a beam with power-null effect; or simply shred the fabric of space and time in a massive explosion called Dimensional Disruption, an irradiating attack with a large radius and extreme magnitude. The phase glasses protect Four Eyes from Dimensional Disruption (passive defense against all radiation). His glasses make his beam attacks more powerful (Lightspeed) and more accurate (Crack Shot).

BRUCE'S HERO: FAST GUY

I'm not a comic book fan, so I'm going to play this like a strategy game and just try to optimize characters for combat. Because of how the engine works, speed is the most important attribute in the game. If you keep moving, you

KRAK

ISSUE #2: SPEEDING BULLETS VS. ELECTRICITY

Issue #2: Miss Electra's burst of electricky ought to be enough, right?

Speed steps attacks before they start.

Speed coupled with knockback makes for a short game.

...an avoid most attacks. If you have high agility, you can often dodge the rest ... my strength and endurance at 4. I'll do ... expect t...

Multiple powers don't make sense in this game. Rather than using several powers that vary in energy expenditure, I'll build in a way that lets me use my single chosen power over and over. First, I'll choose a beam attack with energy damage, and improve it by reducing the energy cost to "trace" and raising the magnitude to "high." Changing the velocity to "very fast" will make the attack difficult to dodge. I'll also take Lightspeed to increase my beam attacks' effectiveness–always take Lightspeed with beam attacks.

My strategy with this hero is simple: shoot the beam weapon and run away. With my long beam range, unless Tom has equally fast heroes or other long-range weapons, he'll be chasing air. I could probably even juggle some points and add Flying to further reduce Tom's chances of counterattacks; attackers using ranged weapons in flight are usually immune to attack. I hope Tom has read some good comic books for his research, because this could get ugly.

I hate cheesy comic book names, so this hero is just named Fast Guy.

Result: Four Eyes manages to hit Fast Guy with Phase Out, but at the same time, Dr. Hydrochloric accidentally hits his companion with an Acid Splash when Fast Guy runs behind Four Eyes. So while Fast Guy is temporarily phased out of this dimension, acid dissolves Four Eyes. Fast Guy phases back in, handily dodges Dr. Hydrochloric's Acid Spray, and two beam hits later, takes him out. Winner: Bruce.

Tom's post-mortem: That's really annoying. I target Bruce's guy and by the time the beam fires off, he's run behind my other character, who gets hit. Those fast guys are really annoying.

Bruce's post-mortem: As expected, the ability to pause at any time means that I just have to step the game enough to sprint out of the way of Tom's attack. My fast beam attack is pretty much unstoppable and can even hit multiple heroes if they're in the same line of fire. As long as I have a clear line of sight, it's all over. Being this fast has some unexpected consequences, like Tom spraying his own unsuspecting hero with acid. Doh!

...set out to fight crime–well, Bruce's super-heroes, at any rate.

Miss Electra is very fast and agile. The power that courses through her body (Energy material type) reduces her ... capacity but also causes it to regenerate quickly. But because she's so hi... attacks against her can release ... usable energy (unpredictable energy bursts). ... opponents with her Electrify attack, she can reach out and zap ... beam attack of medium range and ... and high stunning power, or she can use her ... fast, electrical spinning-kick that attacks all enemies within a 360-degree radius. Her ... low-magnitude melee attacks, and they have ... Spray (short-range blinding ... and Stun Guns (short-range ...

The speed exploit worked so well, I'll build a variation on that theme. Speeding Bullet, which allows a fast character to almost instantaneously rush opponents and knock them down, is extremely powerful for the cost. There's no effective defense. Even Grim Resolve, the counter to knockback effects, doesn't mitigate it. Speeding Bullet is an ability worth building a character around.

For this game I'll make four heroes, each of whom will have Speeding Bullet and a melee attack. I'll choose a generic melee attack, and make the magnitude "extreme" and the swiftness "very fast." I crank speed up to 7 (remember, speed rules) and knock energy down to 3. With four heroes, I won't need to quickly regenerate energy on any single one. All melee heroes should have Blitzkrieg, so I add this, and compensate by choosing Cosmic Chump for vulnerability to mystical attacks. Because of the huge variety of attacks, it's unlikely that a single vulnerability will be exploited by an enemy. Thus, choosing weaknesses is a good way to squeeze some extra points into another area. For the same reason, choosing specialized defenses is useless. I have no intention of picking things up, so I'll get another 100 points by choosing ... clumsy, which prevents a character from picking things up. Also, I'm using the skin for the Bullet character for every hero in every game; his animations are the shortest, and thus he has the fastest attacks. These guys are collectively called Speeding Bullet Guys.

Result: Bruce wins without losing a single hero (only two of them even take damage).

Tom's post-mortem: Oh, the humanity. I ... stupid ... guys keep knocking me over and kicking me around before I can do anything. I try to ... and ... just no ... of the ...

Bruce's post-mortem: It's ... what with all the knockbacks and speeding. The hardest thing is to keep all of my heroes moving, which requires a lot of scrolling and clicking. As long as they're in motion, there's not much Tom can do. Speed rules!

ISSUE #3: LOVE VS. STUNNING

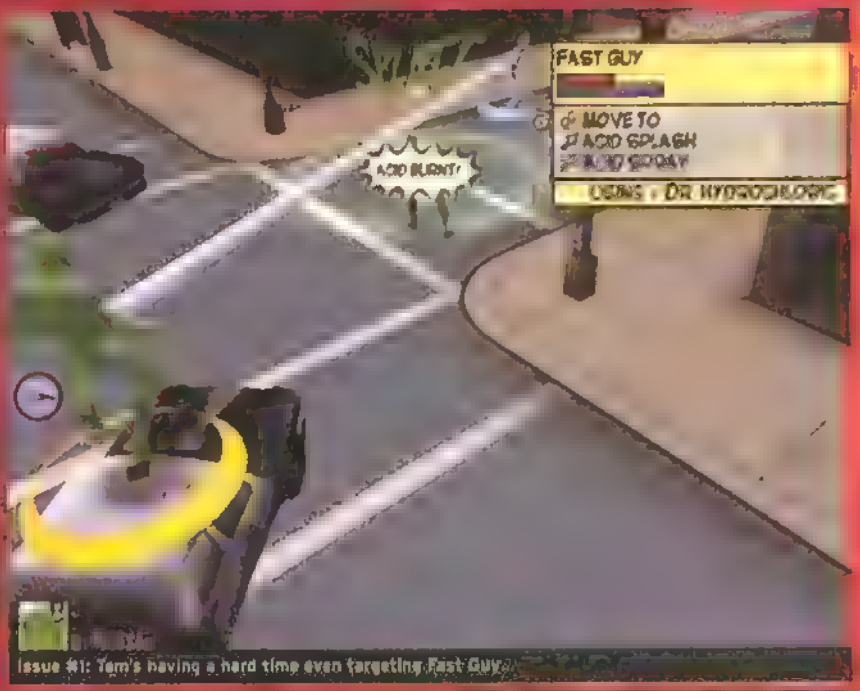
Note: Although Bruce has won by this point, he agrees to a final round just to see what happens.

FREEDOM FORCE: EXCLUSIVE STRATEGY GUIDE

TOM'S HEROES: THE EARL OF LOVE AND HIS SUITORS

Sometimes you get superpowers just by being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Earl Ammer was watching *Blind Date* on UPN when a piece of Venus flew off, hurtled toward Earth, entered our atmosphere, and landed on his house. This fragment of the planet named after the goddess of love imbued him with phenomenal attractiveness. Now his suitors, Stacey, Rebecca, and Daisy Mae, follow him around and do his bidding. He wanted nothing to do with crime fighting, electing instead to simply beat up on Bruce's superheroes.

Issue #3: Being stunned means the Earl has no lovin' to give.



Issue #1: Tom's having a hard time even targeting Fast Guy.

Projectile Men are then free to wail on a stunned Earl.

...which results in friendly fire from Acid Splash!

The Earl of Love isn't in the best shape. Although he's Fantasticany Strong and has Unstoppable endurance, he is Slow and Clumsy from years of sitting on the couch watching television. His attacks are slow and he can't dodge (Ponderous), but he has extra body mass to make up for it (Slow Moving). His television habit has made him vulnerable to mental attacks (Weak Minded). It takes a certain kind of guy to be sitting in the one place where a meteorite lands, so the Earl is a Cosmic Chump vulnerable to energy attacks.

However, the chunk of Venus that fell on him made him Beautiful, so enemies have to do save-versus-hypnosis to melee-attack him. Those who do attack the Earl will be physically pained by striking out at someone so achingly beautiful (Empathy). "For the Love of Earl" is an aura that surrounds him, making his enemies prone to falling into an adoring stupor (extreme-magnitude, hypnosis area-attack with a large radius). The Earl's Love Tap is a high-magnitude, crushing blow with extreme stun and high knockback.

Stacey, Rebecca, and Daisy Mae just had their nails done (Claws), so they can do extra damage with their Stay Away From My Man slaps (fast, piercing, high-magnitude melee attack). Their love for the Earl allows them to send their energy to him (medium-range, high-magnitude transfer beams) to help him with his expensive attacks. Their devotion gives them Tough Guy extra resistance to all attacks and additional Heroic capabilities, but they are Hot Tempered and can get carried away with their affectionate fervor.

BRUCE'S HEROES: STUN MEN AND PROJECTILE MEN

Repeated stuns are a great way to freeze an enemy hero and take them out of the game. Choose an attack with extreme stun and crank it up to Level 5, and you're guaranteed to stun an opposing hero. I'll make it a generic beam attack; take Lightspeed; crank up the skill, stun, velocity, range, and accuracy to maximum; and leave the magnitude at low. The stun guys don't have to do much damage—they just need to keep the enemies stunned while my second set of heroes finishes them off.

I haven't tried a projectile attack yet, so I'll choose one now. Proximity is a disadvantage that gives me extra points without costing me anything (because I want the attack to happen only if there's an enemy around). That offsets the cost of Homing, so I get an essentially undodgeable missile. That in turn allows me to keep the velocity at normal and accuracy at medium. If everything works, the enemy heroes will be stunned and the lack of high-velocity ranged attacks won't be a problem, as it would be against a mobile, fast opponent. Remember, speed rules! I choose Clumsy and Bedeviled—the latter because no one uses Mystic powers and because it sounds British. Add in two stunners, both named Stun Men, and two projectile attackers named Projectile Men and I'm ready to go.

Result: The Earl is stunned early on and never manages to get off an attack. Although the Suitors manage to take out one of Bruce's Stun Men, they're eventually stunned and projectiled to death.

Tom's post-mortem: Okay, that's the last time I use a slow guy. He was constantly on the defensive. In fact, it was as if I wasn't even playing that round. I quickly burned my available Heroic Deeds, but even so it seemed like I was constantly waiting for my heroes to get over being stunned.

Bruce's post-mortem: This was tricky, but the continuous stuns worked pretty well. As in the last battle, keeping all [illegible] motion and away from [illegible] a challenge, but it helped [illegible] was slow and thus easy to keep [illegible] main weapon seemed to be a melee attack, but he was so slow he could never get close enough to use it. I know I've said it before but I'll say it again [illegible]

dark age of Camelot

We've got maps for some of the hardest dungeons scattered all around the three realms in *Dark Age of Camelot*. And as a bonus, we also have the exclusive map for the all-new unmapped realm-versus-realm dungeon Darkness Falls. Now you and your buddies can lurk around these dungeons and not get killed.

DARKNESS FALLS DUNGEON

1 Midgard Entrance (M)
2 Midgard Stores
3 Demoniac Familiar (rat)
4 Portal (P)
5 Plated Fiend
6 Apprentice Necromancer, Plated Fiend
7 Demoniac Familiar (scorpion), Soultorn, Avernal Quasit
8 Demoniac Familiar (boar), Young Necromancer, Soultorn
9 Lilispawn, Demoniac Familiar (spider, scorpion)
10 Deamhaness, Demoniac Familiar (wolf)
11 Soultorn
12 Ricot
13 Experienced Necromancer, Demoniac Familiar (cat, scorpion, boar)
14 Soultorn, Malochian Tempter
15 Lecherous Gregs
16 Umbrood Warrior
17 Chthonic Knights
18 Commander Abger, Lieutenant Persun
19 Chthonic Knights, Pale Guardian, Umbral Aegis, Chaosian, Umbrood Warrior, Essence Shredder (in pit), Earl Glassalab
20 Prince Abdin
21 Molochian Tempter, Naburite Drinker, Cursed Necromancer
22 Cambion, Soultorn, Demoniac Familiar (scorpion, boar, wolf, lynx), Naburite Drinker, Cursed Necromancer
23 Essence Shredder, Condemned Necromancer, Tormented Necromancer
24 Mahr, Succubus, Nightmare, Chthonian Crawler
25 Director Kebil (wanders)
26 Portal (P)
27 Succubus, Nightmare
28 Princess Nahemah
29 Cambion
30 Mahr, Cursed Necromancer, Condemned Necromancer, Tormented Necromancer
31 Essence Shredder
32 Mutilator
33 Portal (P)
34 Mutilator, Chaosian, Umbral Aegis, Pale Guardian, Earl Ipostian, Essence Shredder (in pit)
35 Prince Asmolen
36 Ricot
37 Apprentice Necromancer, Demoniac Familiar (lynx, wolf, spider)
38 Soultorn, Demoniac Familiar (lynx)
39 Ricot
40 Avernal Quasit, Soultorn, Young Necromancer
41 Young Necromancer, Avernal Quasit, Demoniac Familiar (cat, scorpion, boar)
42 Necromancer, Young Necromancer, Soultorn
43 Experienced Necromancer, Cursed Necromancer, Malochian Tempter
44 Naburite Drinker
45 Apprentice Necromancer, Demoniac Familiar, Plated Fiend, Soultorn
46 Demoniac Familiar (rat)
47 Hibernia Entrance (H)
48 Hibernia Stores
49 Lilispawn
50 Soultorn
51 Deamhaness, Necromancer
52 Ricot
53 Experienced Necromancer, Soultorn, Ricot
54 Malochian Tempter, Soultorn
55 Archivist Borath
56 Essence Shredder, Tormented Necromancer, Condemned Necromancer
57 Ricot, Deamhaness
58 Soultorn, Experienced Necromancer, Demoniac Familiar (lynx), Ricot
59 Deamhaness, Lilispawn, Necromancer, Soultorn
60 Lilispawn, Soultorn, Young Necromancer
61 Ricot, Experienced Necromancer, Soultorn
62 Malochian Tempter, Soultorn
63 Mallyck the Cook
64 Cursed Necromancer, Malochian Tempter
65 Cursed Necromancer, Naburite Drinker, Soultorn, Demoniac Familiar (wolf, lynx)
66 Cursed Necromancer, Condemned Necromancer, Demoniac Familiar (lynx)
67 Tormented Necromancer, Condemned Necromancer, Essence Shredder, Cambion, Demoniac Familiar (spider, wolf, lynx)
68 Portal (P)
69 Inquisitors
70 Umbrood Warrior, Pale Guardian, Inquisitor, Earl Mermer, Chaosian, Essence Shredder (in pit), Umbral Aegis (in pit)
71 Prince Ba'alorian
72 Lilispawn, Soultorn, Young Necromancer
73 Young Necromancer, Plated Fiend, Deamhaness, Avernal Quasit, Demoniac Familiar (boar)
74 Avernal Quasit, Young Necromancer, Demoniac Familiar (cat, scorpion), Soultorn
75 Plated Fiends, Apprentice Necromancer, Demoniac Familiar (ant, cat)
76 Plated Fiend, Apprentice Necromancer, Demoniac Familiar (ant)
77 Albion Stores
78 Demoniac Familiar (rat)
79 Portal (P)
80 Albion Entrance (A)
81 Center
82 Umbral Hunt
83 Gate Room
84 Gatekeeper Domme
85 Umbral Aegis, Succubus, Inquisitors, Mutilators, Chthonic Knights, Chthonian Crawler, Nightmare
86 Duke Elmure
87 Marquis Scottlax
88 Duke Sallis, Marquis Sabonach, Earl Mercur
89 High Lord Oro
90 Marquis Focallast, Duke Harboris, Earl Lenox
91 High Lord Baelerdoth
92 Duke Zepor, Marquis Almen, Earl Oraxus
93 High Lord Sacor
94 Duke Eligar
95 Marquis Dortaleen
96 Duke Aypol
97 Marquis Chaosmar, Duke Aliac, Earl Amagin
98 High Lord Balin
99 Portal (P)
100 Duke Satary
101 Marquis Valupa
102 Chthonic Knights, Mutilators, Inquisitors, Earl Vone
103 Grand Chancellor Adremal
104 The Chamberlain, Pale Guardian, Chaosian, Marquis Haurian, Inquisitors, Mutilators, Chthonic Knights, Umbrood Warrior, Behemoth
105 Lenion

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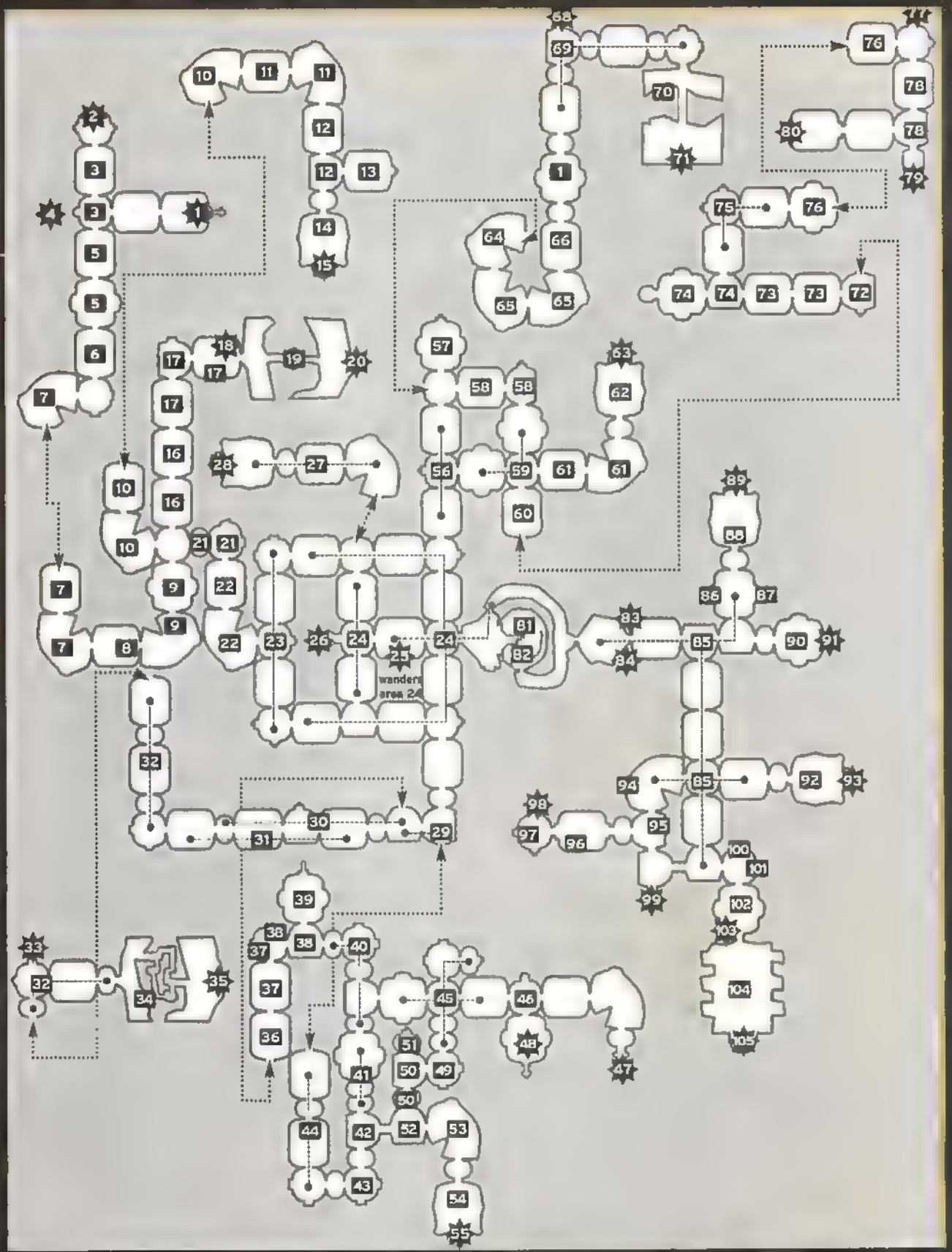
Get the official *Dark Age of Camelot* strategy guide from Prima Games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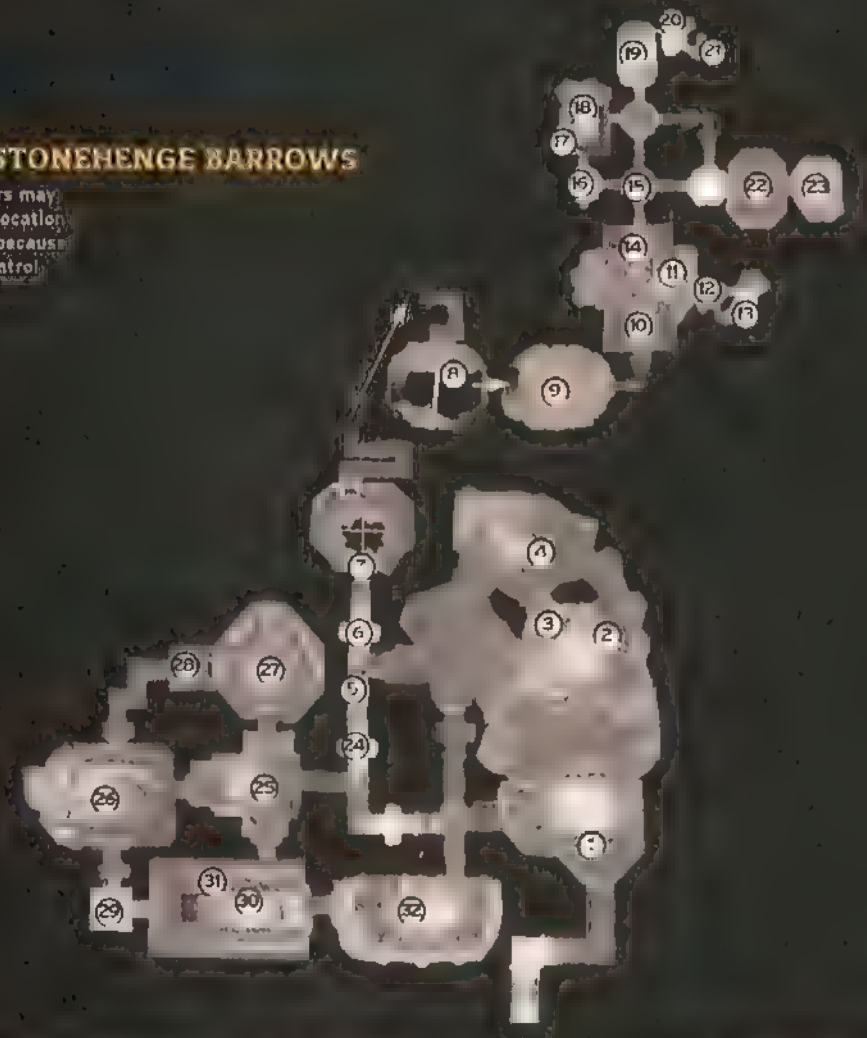
area 24

dark age of Camelot

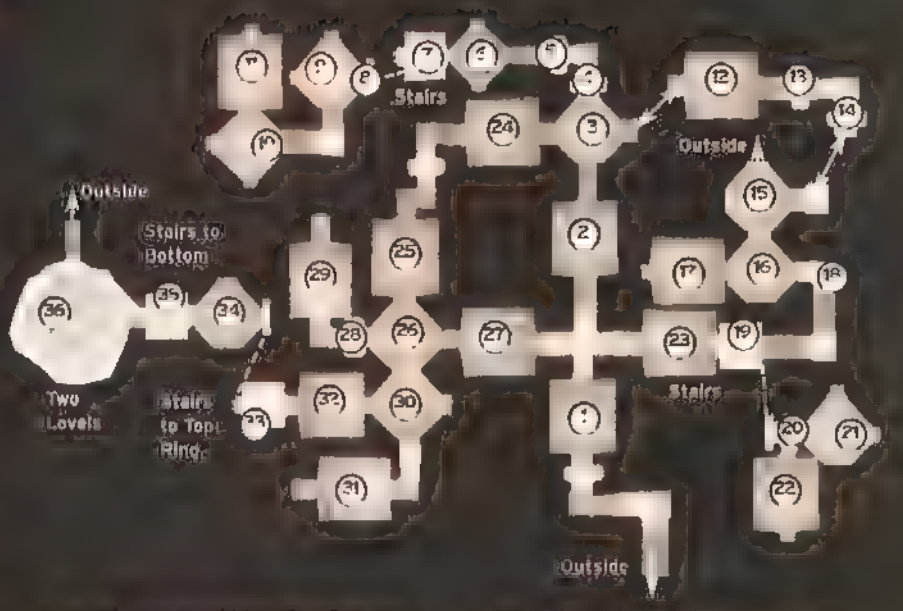
ALBION
DUNGEON: STONEHENGE BARROWS

Note: Many monsters may not be at the exact location marked on the map because they wander along patrol routes.



1. Decaying Tomb Raider, Undead Retainer, Grave Goblin Whelp
2. Diseased Rat, Cave Goblin, Tunneler
3. Cave Hound, Diseased Rat, Cave Goblin Shaman
4. Grave Goblin, Grave Goblin Shaman, Cave Hound, Tunneler, Diseased Rat
5. Glowing Goo
6. Repentant Follower
7. Soul Harvester, Ectoplasm
8. Soul Harvester, Ectoplasm
9. Soul Harvester, Ectoplasm
10. Ectoplasm, Echo of Life, Tomb Keeper, Priestess of Purity, Templar Avenger
11. Scaled Fiend
12. Deep Goblin
13. Deep Goblin Blighter, Cave Hound
14. Dark Fire, Tomb Keeper
15. Tomb Wight, Ghoulic Vampire, Tome Wight, Creeping Ooze
16. Ghoulic Viper
17. Barrow Wight
18. Megalith Wight, King's Wight, Barrow Wight
19. Celtic Sepulcher Warrior, Celtic Lich, Ossuary Guardian
20. Celtic Lich
21. Celtic Lich, Ossuary Guardian
22. Sacrificial Soul, Petrified Grovewood, Skeletal Druid
23. Skeletal Druid, Sacrificial Soul
24. Redbone Skeleton, Glowing Goo, Repentant Follower
25. Spectral Essence, Malefic Phantom
26. Stone Sentinel, Pendragon Ardent, Pendrake
27. Spiritual Advisor, Malefic Phantom, Spectral Wizard, Wizard Lichas
28. Spiritual Advisor
29. Repentant Follower
30. Fallen Warrior
31. Vigilant Soul
32. Marrow Leach, Decayed Barbarian, Saxon Bone Skeleton, Reanimated Foe

HIBERNIA
DUNGEON: MUIRE TOMB



1. Crypt Spider, Mummy Hag
2. Crypt Spider
3. Mummy Hag, Tomb Creeper
4. Tomb Creeper
5. Tomb Creeper
6. Muire Man-at-arms, Conaire Muire, Muire Hero
7. Muire Champion
8. Muire Champion
9. Muire Hero, Mummy Hag Wizard, Muire Herbalist
10. Death Worm, Muire Champion
11. Muire Hero, Muire Herbalist, Mummy Hag Wizard, Shyone Muire
12. Murkman, Alsandair Muire
13. Tomb Creeper
14. Tomb Creeper
15. Tomb Creeper, Corpse Devourer
16. Tomb Creeper, Corpse Devourer
17. Crypt Spider, Tomb Dweller
18. Tomb Creeper
19. Tomb Creeper
20. Tomb Creeper, Corpse Devourer
21. Tomb Dweller, Corpse Devourer
22. Muire Lady-in-waiting, Corpse Devourer, Beare Muire
23. Mummy Hag, Crypt Spider
24. Murkman, Death Worm
25. Hellhag, Mummy Hag, Death Worm, Murkman
26. Hellhag, Death Worm, Mummy Hag
27. Crypt Spider, Mummy Hag
28. Tomb Creeper
29. Carrion Scorpionide, Scorpionide Regina
30. Suiter Spirit
31. Suiter Spirit, Muire Lady-in-waiting
32. Corpse Devourer, Muire Hero
33. Muire Champion, Muire Herbalist
34. Muire Hero, Muire Champion
35. Muire Hero, Muire Champion
36. Muire Champion, Muire Hero, Muire Herbalist, Quillan Muire

MIDGARD
DUNGEON: VARULVHAMN

1. Werewolf Churi
2. Were, Churi, Crazed Lycantic
3. Crazed Lycantic, Were, Churi, Flaz
4. Were, Churi, Crazed Lycantic
5. Were, Churi
6. Wolfspider, Large Wolfspider, Were, Churi, Wolfaur Pragmatic, Wolfaur Quixot
7. Wolfaur Q., Wolfaur Pragmatic, Thelod
8. Wolfaur Q.
9. Wolfaur Pragmatic, Wolfaur Q.
10. W. Bodyguard, W. Noble
11. W. Grimnought, Lord Ungar, Lord Grym, Lord Brumma, Lord Vild, Lord Gifttand, Lord Huggleand
12. W. Bodyguard
13. Frenetic Wolfspider
14. Wolfaur Q.
15. Wolfaur Q., Wolfaur Lunarian
16. Wolfaur Lunarian, Wolfaur Q.
17. Frenetic Wolfspider
18. Wolfaur Q.
19. Frenetic Wolfspider

Always scout enemy parties and reposition your troops accordingly so you can gang up on the strongest threat with your best units.

Disciples II: Dark Prophecy

Improve your leadership with these tips and save all of Nevendaar

Nevendaar is being torn apart by warfare and the predations of ravenous Undead and sinister demons. Only the brave efforts of a few heroes can stem this tide of evil. Equip yourself with these tips to beat back the hordes and unite the realm under your banner.

Choosing a Race

The most important choice you make in the beginning is your player race. The Human Empire has the best healing and protection but weaker troops (although faster leveling offsets their weakness). The Mountain Clan has the strongest units, with the most hit points and best damage, but they're slow in battle and over land. The Undead Hordes use lots of death and mind attacks (which can be negated with spell protections), and they have powerful troops that can unravel unprepared opponents. The Legion of the Damned likewise has strong troops, and great attack spells as well, although they rely heavily on fire. If you are new to *Disciples*, start as the Empire—their unique healing abilities make them the easiest to play.

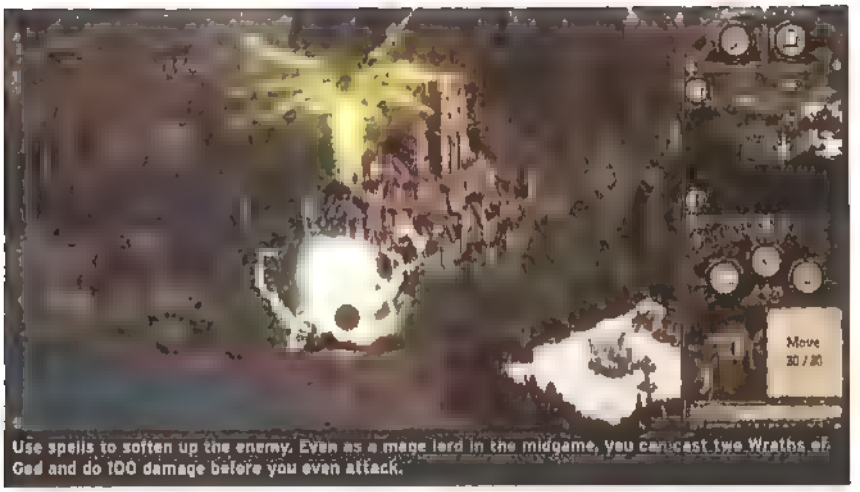
Choosing a Starting Hero

The next most important choice is which lord to play. In most cases, the mage lord is the way to go. Not so much for the fifth-level spells, but for the 50 percent discount on spell research and the ability to cast a spell twice per turn—that means double the damage, double the summoned creatures, and double the buffs in one round. Also, the 50 percent mana saved means you can actually cast the spell you researched, whereas the other player spends all his mana just to learn it. Over the long run, the mage lord gets more mileage out of his mana. In addition, he gets the truly powerful fifth-level spells, some of which can do more than 100 damage per shot or heal 150 hit points.

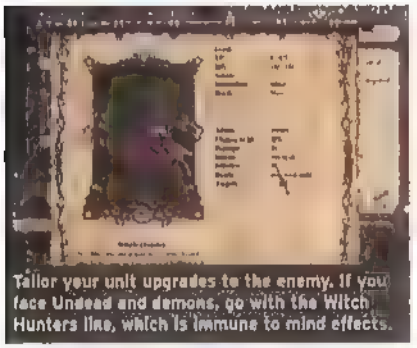
If you insist on choosing a non-mage lord, consider this: The warrior lord must stay in the front lines, so he will always be the first target for AI and human players, and unless you are playing the Human Empire, you won't be able to heal him quickly without losing his turn. That's because the only way to heal him in battle is by using potions during his action, which negates the whole reason for getting a warrior hero to attack. At mid levels, when you face really powerful units that do more than 100 damage, your warrior lord is almost always dead. The guildmaster has the advantage here in that he can be protected in the back row, just like the mage lord, and still be effective. And he gives you some interesting thief options. Thus, your first choice should be the mage, followed by the guildmaster and then warrior. Just keep in mind the need to protect your mage lord. If you're the Empire, always assign a healer to his party. And if you are about to battle ranged attackers or spellcasters, boost your mage lord's initiative with spells and potions so he can kill them first. And always enhance your armor when you can.

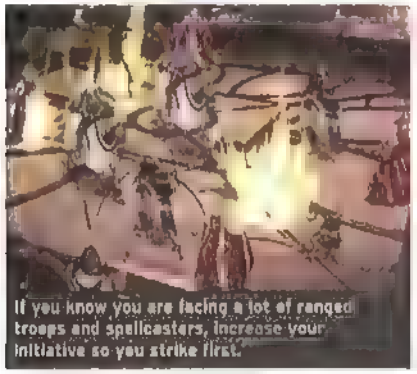
Leveling Up Your Hero

Although you will need multiple heroes to scout the map and protect your territories, it's better to have one superhero and several minor heroes as backup. Because experience points are such a valued commodity, concentrate them in one hero and his units instead of spreading them out. *Disciples II* favors exponential growth of heroes and units, so you get much more benefit



Use spells to soften up the enemy. Even as a mage lord in the midgame, you can cast two Wraths of God and do 100 damage before you even attack.


Tailor your unit upgrades to the enemy. If you face Undead and demons, go with the Witch Hunters line, which is immune to mind effects.


If you know you are facing a lot of ranged troops and spellcasters, increase your initiative so you strike first.

from having one Level 6 hero than three Level 2 heroes. In addition, you really want those skills that you get at level advancement. Naturally, the best ones come only at higher levels.

The best skill to get is leadership, which lets you add a unit to your party each time you take it. Take this skill as soon as you can. The other top skills you should take are might, which adds 25 percent to damage; natural armor, which boosts defense by 20 percent; first strike, which increases initiative 50 percent; weapon master, which increases your units' earned experience by 25 percent; and toughness, which boosts your leader's HP by 20 percent. Skills that let you use items, such as orbs and talismans, are useless. Your heroes are so much better at attacking than using these items that the skills are a waste. Select the items instead and acquire skills that give your leader benefits in combat and that don't need to be activated with an action. If you must choose between item skills, go with banners, which give all of your units a benefit. Never go for orbs.

Resource Gathering and Enemy Mana

When you're streaking across the map claiming mana nodes, be sure to collect secondary mana in addition to your primary mana. Spells from Level 3 and up cost secondary mana to research and cast, and you'll get a huge advantage by casting spells that don't require your primary mana source. That's because you are much more limited in the number of castings you have for your primary spells—half of the required mana must go to spell research. For example, if you are an Empire player, half of your life mana goes to spell research, but 100 percent of your harvested runestone mana and infernal mana can be used for spells. Your Empire spells can be researched only with life mana, but you can buy Mountain Clan and Legion of the Damned spells for gold instead of mana at Magic Towers. If you've been collecting life, runestone, and infernal mana at the same rate, you'll be able to cast the Clan and Legion spells twice as often as you cast Empire spells. If you are a warrior or guildmaster lord, you'll actually be able to cast them three times as much because your research cost is double the mage lord's.

Capture enemy mana as quickly as possible and get new spells at an equally rapid pace. Buy them at Magic Towers, ally with the AI or human players to learn spells, or use your thief to steal spells if you are the guildmaster. Do all this and you can sling even more spells without worrying about having enough mana left over for research.

The Importance of Spellcraft

Magic is the deciding factor in a battle. Before you go into combat, take advantage of your spells. If facing neutral monsters and enemy units outside of towns, throw down direct damage spells. These can do from 10 to 125 points of damage, depending on level, often destroying the unit without making you confront them (you'll want the experience, though, so use the damage spells to soften them up). Here again it's great to be a mage lord and be able to cast a spell twice per round.

If you want to engage in city siege or exploration of ruins, you can't damage the occupants inside with a direct damage spell. Instead, summon a creature before you enter and send it in to wreak some havoc before you follow up with your hero. Summoned creatures are also useful for recon. You can't see the makeup of enemy parties unless you have a thief, but it's unlikely that you'll have a thief accompanying every one of your armies, so use summoned creatures to scout the enemy instead. The creatures will die, but you can peek at the enemy's numbers and do some damage to them as well.

Useful noncombative spells are those that enhance or extend your movement capabilities. Spells like Haste and Winds of Travel let your heroes make an additional move per turn, while spells like Seafaring negate the stiff movement penalty for crossing water. If you want better mobility, play as the Empire or Mountain Clans. Conversely, the Legion of the Damned and Undead Hordes have spells that can paralyze the enemy by limiting its movement.

Also be sure to stack spell effects. You can't get double the benefit from the same spell twice, but you can cast similar spells of different elements. For example, Strength is an Empire spell that costs life mana and boosts your units' attack damage by 10 percent. Vithar's Might is a Clan spell that costs runestone mana and also boosts damage by 10 percent. Cast them both on an army to give it a 20 percent damage boost. If you add the Legion equivalent spell, you'll get another 15 percent. So find those spells, get the extra mana, and stack the effects.

If you field armies with these improved stats, you'll demolish the enemy. But key to this strategy is finding secondary mana and buying cross-faction spells. Use potions to complement these spells to achieve even better results.

Tips for Battle

When casting spells prior to battle, always go with defense-boosting spells over offense. The enemy tends to concentrate fire on a single unit, so you want that unit to have better armor for absorbing the multiple hits. It's better to receive -20 damage from three enemy hits than to do +20 damage with one hit against one enemy.

When you're in combat, concentrate fire on one opponent at a time. Position your strongest melee unit in the middle of your party. He can hit enemies at the top, middle, or bottom.

Always scout your enemy before you fight and then position your troops accordingly. If the strongest enemy is in the top slot, but your strongest unit is in the bottom slot, you won't be able to hit the enemy if you have an intervening friendly unit in your middle slot. But you want to take out this enemy first, so move your knight to the top slot so he can hit the enemy.

One easy way to defeat Undead units is to go into battle with Undead skeleton warriors. Many Undead units are immune to death effects, but in turn do death damage. Undead spellcasters and dragons, for example, do death damage with their attacks. But the lowly skeleton, which is a first-level summoned creature, is Undead and thus immune to death damage, and it can deal weapon damage with an armed attack. If facing neutral Undead or an Undead player, throw a skeleton at them and watch them run or die.

Ghost Recon: Desert Siege

The best tactics for the deadliest of firefights

Desert Siege focuses on infantry tactics, just as *Ghost Recon* did. Use the tactics wisely, and your team will dispatch enemy soldiers like Green Berets. Some tactics are useful all the time, while others work only in specific situations. Tactics learned from *Ghost Recon* missions apply to *Desert Siege*, so bone up on them (refer to *CGW*'s April issue). Here's a rundown of two of the harder missions; apply what you learn here to any other mission.

Flame Pillar minimap

Flame Pillar

SITREP: Eliminate explosives crew, rescue captive workers, reach extraction zone, and if possible eliminate all enemy soldiers.

OPERATIVES: You'll need at least one sniper outfitted with an M24, M98, or M82A1 sniper rifle. Place him in Team Charlie. Use riflemen to fill out the rest of the teams. Riflemen should go for M16s, OICWs, M203s, or other high-velocity bullet launchers. Make sure you take along one soldier with high leadership points.

WARNING ORDER: Your team inserts into the southeastern corner of the map. Get ready for instant action by positioning your sniper 20 meters ahead of the teams and prepare for attack. Have him lay prone with a clear line of sight past the road near the boulders congregated around the bend. Get ready for a firefight with enemy patrols as you cautiously move your teams forward. Enemy soldiers will have their backs to you, so quickly take them out. As soon as the firefight erupts, a jeep will start moving in from the refinery in the north; take it out. After you've dispatched it, there will be another patrol to the northwest of your position that you will want to concentrate your firepower on. When the area south of the refinery is clear, position your sniper so he has a clear line of sight toward the refinery's southern entrances. Then move one fire team at a time to the refinery edge and eliminate lingering patrols.

Next, enter the refinery with your Alpha and Bravo teams. Hold one of the teams near the southern entrance in support, while cautiously moving ahead until you see the enemy soldier planting demo charges on the two pillars in the center. He is your primary focus. Eliminate him, and you can sweep the refinery by moving counterclockwise with your two teams taking out the enemy. Make sure to room-clear buildings along the way.

Find the enemy soldier placing demo charges in the center and kill him. Then clear the area in the refinery before taking on the patrols at the enemy gate.

Make sure you concentrate your firepower around the narrow path near the insertion point. Have your sniper take a position near the rocks to the right of the road. Be prepared for an enemy jeep racing toward you.

Next move your teams, including your sniper, to the east of the refinery with a clear view of the gate located near the western wall. Outside the gate, there's another patrol arriving to help the defenders, including a jeep full of baddies. Snipe as many enemy soldiers as you can while moving your teams into position to take out anyone outside the gate. If you're lucky, a few aggressive bad guys will burst inside the entrance for an assault. They'll make for easy pickings.

After killing them, check your map and move your teams outside the refinery gate to sweep the area between the refinery and depot. There are two more patrols lingering about. Sweep your team toward the depot and clear out the rest of the enemy en route to your final leg of the mission: rescuing three hostages. Have your sniper take out the .50-caliber machine gun nest located in the southwestern corner of the depot. Move inside the depot and get ready for close-quarters battle. A handful of enemy soldiers are guarding the hostages, so be careful not to get any of the hostages killed or this will cause the mission to fail. Secure the hostages and make a bead for extraction, preparing to eliminate enemy soldiers remaining between the depot and extraction point.

AFTER ACTION REPORT: If you successfully complete all objectives, including killing all enemy soldiers, you will unlock a specialist for the next mission.

Gamma Dawn

SITREP: Place demo charges at Aurora crash sites, secure enemy base, reach extraction zone, and secure supply depot

OPERATIVES: The mission requires at least one demolitions specialist, outfitted with demo charges for blowing up three pieces of the top-secret aircraft, Aurora. Grouping for this mission should be the standard three two-one-team setup. The Alpha team should consist of two r flemen and a support specialist. Bravo team should contain one or two demolit on specialists, and Charlie is slotted for your lone sniper. Use the usual weapon load-outs for outfitting team members.

WARNING ORDER This is a tough mission because it takes place at night Use night-vision optics whenever possible. Start by crossing the br dge directly north of your insertion point. Immediately move Bravo toward the first pile of wreckage to the east of the bridge. Position the sn per with a clear view of the draw to the east. Have Alpha move to the hills directly north of Bravo in order to protect their flank. As Bravo team approaches the wreck, an enemy patrol will make its way over the ridge, within Alpha and Charlie's killing zone. Elimnate the patrol and move Bravo in to set charges. There's a 30-second delay before detonation, so get out while you can.

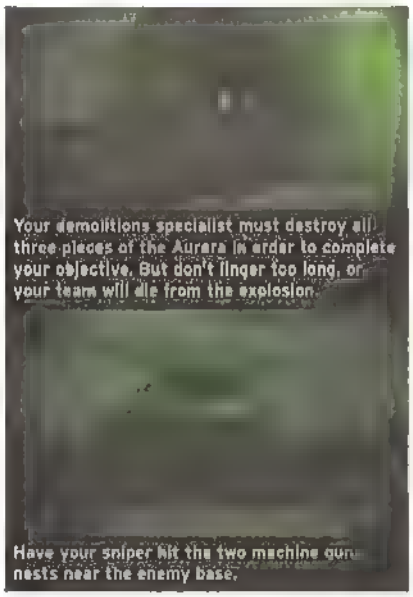
As soon as the first piece is destroyed, start making your way to the next piece of wreckage. But beware of enemy patrols making a bead to Bravo. Make sure you parallel Alpha along the ridgeline in support of Bravo. Both teams should have no problem with the patrols. Move Bravo toward the second piece of wreckage and plant the charges Quickly clear the area and move up the hil to the third and final piece of wreckage. Another patrol may be guarding the wreck, so move cautiously. When the area is clear, plant the charge and leave You've completed your first objective.

The next objective is to clear the base with the towers at the northern edge of the map. Move your teams, including the sniper, into position approximately 100 meters from the base. Use the small bu ldings in the center of the map for cover, but first clear out the patrols there. Make sure your sniper is in position before moving Alpha around to the east to find cover behind the rocks near there. When the sniper is in position, have him take out the two machine gun towers along the base walls. When the shots are fired, enemy patrols inside the base wil pour out, ready for a fight. Nail them as they come out Then, have Alpha advance nearer the entrance of the base, followed by Bravo with Charlie prov.ding cover fire.

Once Alpha and Bravo teams are in position, move into the base to look for straggers. Your teams should be in suppress mode as they move caut.ously inside. There will be an enemy soldier located in the small building in the midd.e. Either clear the building by tossing grenades inside or enter the building CQB-style. When you've cleared the base, your second objective is complete. Now it's time to head to the extraction zone or move your teams east toward the depot for the optional ob,ective. Most of the random patrols should have been eliminated earlier, but keep an eye out for an enemy Jeep carrying soldiers. Surround the depot, eliminate enemies near the bu lding, and then move either Alpha or Bravo inside the bui ding to clear out the last remaining enemy solider

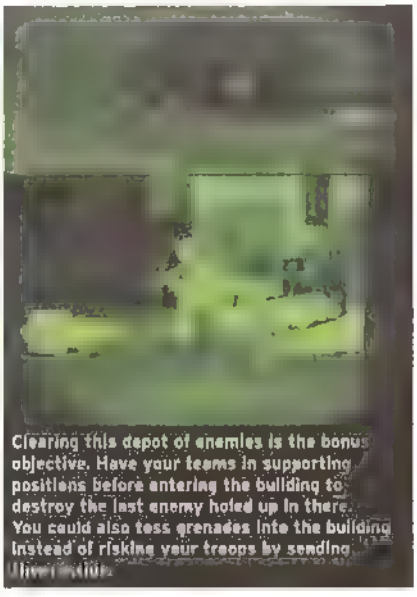
AFTER ACTION REPORT: Successfully completing Gamma Dawn and the bonus objective will gain you a support specialist for the next miss.on.

Review the Gamma Dawn minimap in order to determine the locations of the plane wreck.



Your demolitions specialist must destroy all three pieces of the Aurora in order to complete your objective. But don't linger too long, or your team will die from the explosion.

Have your sniper hit the two machine gun nests near the enemy base.



Clearing this depot of enemies is the bonus objective. Have your teams in supporting positions before entering the building to destroy the last enemy holed up in there. You could also toss grenades into the building instead of risking your troops by sending them in.

Continued from page 97

adjustments as you see fit. For instance, if you want to see players ejected every time they argue with an umpire, change that setting from .05 to 1.0. I don't know why you would want to do that, but the point is that you can.

Console Fever

Sadly, the PlayStation 2 version of *High Heat* now seems to be 3DO's priority, and it shows in the tune file. Obviously, we'll discuss the section labeled "PC Only," not the "PS2 Only" section.

This section contains 10 fine tuning variables, which are new to this year's version of the game. They were carried over from the dumbed-down tune file that PS2 players have access to, and unfortunately, 3DO replaced some crucial settings from prior versions. In the past, we were able to make very detailed adjustments to aspects like the sweet spot on the bat, how often good contact would be made, and crucial allowances for a realistic number of foul balls and strikeouts. Now all we can do is make global adjustments to the hitting abilities of each side. This is kind of like going from 1600x1200 resolution to 640x480. I keep hitting abilities at their default setting of five and make my fielding and speed adjustments elsewhere. The rest of this section deals with the position of the camera for each of the settings in the game (low, medium, blimp, and so on) and the look of the fielding markers. Tweak the camera placement and develop your own custom settings. I prefer the Low batting cam and the Medium fielding cam, and I have no problem with the other settings.

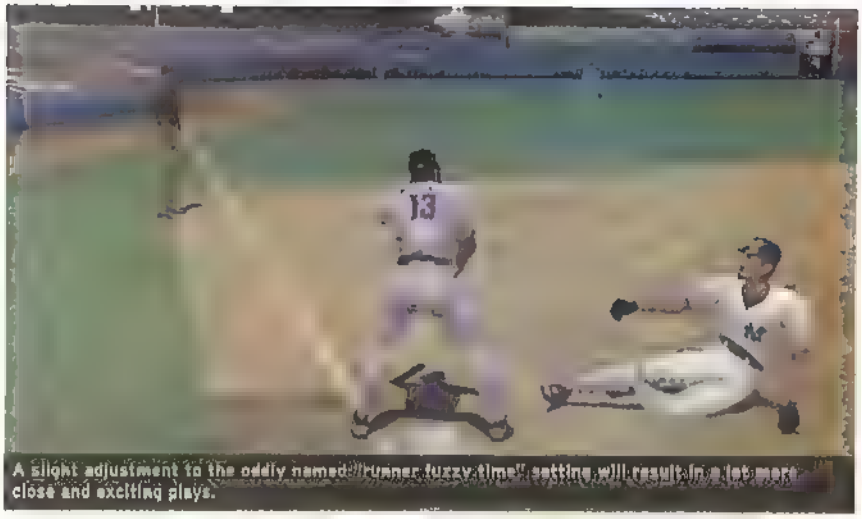
Out of Control

This next section has an interesting new addition that lets you customize your controller. I've been happy with the default controls of my SideWinder gamepad, but I'm glad to finally have a way to adjust things (albeit a confusing one). Here you can also make changes to the positioning of the infielders, such as how deep or shallow they play. I haven't made any changes to these settings, but it's a nice option that really lets you fine-tune the game. You can adjust the friction and bounce of the ball in this section as well. I find that the friction numbers are a little high, so I have reduced them by .05 each.

Showtime

Now we come to the most important section of the tune file. When deciding on a difficulty level keep in mind that the major differences are in how the CPU players will take advantage of you. For example, at the higher levels, the AI will be looking for patterns in your pitches. If you like to throw a lot of first-pitch fastballs, the other team will notice this very quickly and go to the plate looking for the fastball. For the most realistic representation, it's recommended that you play on MVP level.

The first thing you must do is reduce the catch radius. Think of this as the size of your glove. The default 5.0 setting has you wearing a glove the size of one of those foam #1 fingers you can buy at the ballpark. I recommend you reduce catch radius to about 2.5.



A slight adjustment to the oddly named "runner fuzzy time" setting will result in a lot more close and exciting plays.

Now we come to the speed of the runners. I find that the fastest guys are a little too quick, but the slower players seem to have a virtual piano on their backs. Slightly decreasing the fastest runner speed and increasing the slowest runner speed easily fix this. I changed each by a factor of .2 and have been happy with the results. The "delay out of batter's box" number is just that—how much hesitation a player has (a percentage of a second) before he starts running. After changing the runners' speed, I found the delay number to be acceptable.

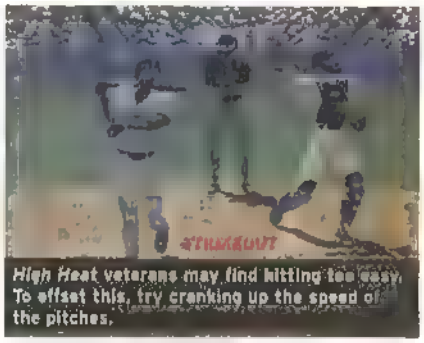
The throwing numbers were the opposite. Here I decreased the bottom number and increased the top by one. This creates a greater difference between the guys with wet noodles for arms and those who are packing cannons.

The pitch speeds are an excellent way to handicap yourself, and in this year's version, changing the speed is the only way to help increase the strikeout totals when you're at bat. New players will probably find the default settings acceptable, but those of us who have been playing the game for a few years need to crank these numbers up to give ourselves a decent challenge. I increased each of the pitches by one full number—if it was originally .6801, I changed it to .7801. I also increased the forkball setting (which is now the cut fastball in the game—another sign of how lazy 3DO was with this year's PC game) to .7490. As you get to be a better hitter, you can always adjust these numbers to reflect your skills.

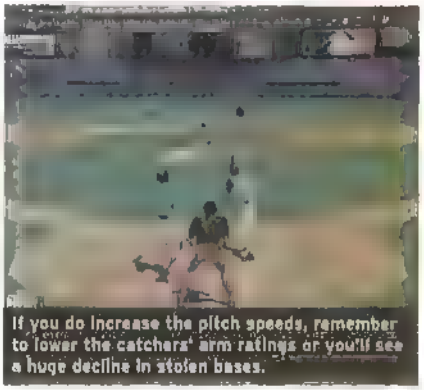
Speeding up the pitches will also affect base stealing due to the decreased time the runner has to get to the base. To remedy this, make the catchers' arms less powerful. This is a tricky balancing act, and you might need to make several adjustments. I've reduced both values to .775 from their original .855.

Pitcher control is set way too high (especially now with *HH 2003*'s huge strike zone) in the original tune file. I reduced it to .637 for both pitchers and have been quite pleased with the results. Conversely, the error settings are much too low; I increased the fielding error modifier by .2, the throwing modifier by .4, and the catching modifier by .5.

Now we come to the dreaded "computer runner fuzzy time." This odd-sounding setting basically tells the CPU runners how often to make a base-running blunder. The lower the number the more aggressive the runners will be. I found the default number to be just a bit too high, as the runners would take too many stupid chances on the base paths. By reducing the low-end number to -1.117 from -1.175 and keeping the high number stable, I've seen much better results and more realistic outfield assist numbers.



High Heat veterans may find hitting too easy. To offset this, try cranking up the speed of the pitches.



If you do increase the pitch speeds, remember to lower the catchers' arm ratings or you'll see a huge decline in stolen bases.

Keep It Real

The bottom line is that everyone has their own ideas as to how a baseball sim should play, and the tune file gives us the ability to tweak the results to our liking, which is one of the reasons why *High Heat* is considered such a fine game.

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No, I can't take out the garbage now, woman—my dwarf is poisoned! **By Jeff Green**

Computer gamers may not be the hunkiest slabs of beefcake on the block, but that doesn't mean that some women can't be tricked into loving us. Take my wife—please!

Some of you may be surprised to know that I am, in fact, married. Blame my media handlers. Like The Beatles before me, who, at the height of their popularity, were told to keep their marriages quiet lest the lovesick teeny-boppers learn the truth and stop buying records, I must maintain an aura of "availability" so that female readers will renew their *CGW* subscriptions in hopes of someday possibly scoring with me.

The sad truth though, ladies, is that I am taken. I know, I know—it's a heartbreaker. I'm sorry. Guys like me don't come around that often, it's true. That pasty—almost radioactive—skin tone, that simultaneously frail yet overweight physique, that roguish but vaguely depressing lack of ambition. Mom always told you I was out there somewhere, didn't she? And now you find out I'm taken. That's gotta hurt.

***

Actually, the real reason why my wife hasn't appeared very often on this page (other than the restraining order, I mean) is that, well, frankly, she's not a gamer. Computer games are to her what the rest of life is to us: not important.

You may ask: How is this even possible? Is she an alien? I'm no scientist—I have a bachelor's degree in pinball—but I believe that the gamer gene must be programmed into our DNA. You either have it or you don't. I've tried over the years to get the missus interested in this rewarding pastime of ours, but to no avail.

Here is a brief chronological history of my attempts and the results so far:

1994

Me: Look at this game, *Myst*. It's incredible. It comes on a CD-ROM. It looks like a painting!

The Wife: Did you remember to pay the gas bill today?

1998

Me: C'mere quick! You have got to see *Half-Life*. It's like a great scary movie. Look! Look at that freakin' head crab!

The Wife: Did you remember to pay the gas bill?

Computer games are to her what the rest of life is to us: not important.

2000

Me: Now here's the game for you. It's called *The Sims*. Even nongamers love it. It's like a living dollhouse. Look—that guy is going to the bathroom on the floor.

The Wife: You forgot to pay the gas bill again, didn't you?

***

Let me make one thing perfectly clear: I am not bitter. Sure, at times I've wished that she were the kind of woman who realized that leveling up Liberty Lad is more important than tackling the two weeks' worth of dishes I've let pile up in the sink. And yeah, I've fantasized about being one of those lucky guys who marries a female gamer and has hot Friday night sessions of naked *Counter-Strike* on the home LAN when the kid is asleep.

But the honest truth is that I don't need another gamer in the house. Having someone around who pays attention to the real world does have its advantages. Meals, for example. Shelter. Actual, non-NPC, real-life friends. The last time we threw a party at our house, my wife had to completely redo the invitation list, because when I did it, the top three names were Minsc, Cate Archer, and Man-Bot.

And then there's the parenting issue. I've already, regrettably, turned our 8-year-old daughter into a bona fide dork who calls me in the middle of the day desperately trying to process in her head whether Count Dooku was Darth Sidious' new Sith apprentice or not. That's my influence. Also from me: Gollum imitations, surefire procrastination tricks, and a true geek's appreciation of widescreen DVDs. From the wife we have, among other things: language, intelligence, social skills, cultural awareness, and morals. It's kind of a yin/yang thing we have going on at our house.

The point of all this is simply to say to the missus: thank you. Thanks for putting up with me. We gamers like to feel sorry for ourselves when civilians like yourself can't quite understand why we get all worked up over these stupid games. We get resentful knowing that you think this pastime is useless in the grand scheme of things. The secret truth is that, deep down, we know you're right. And we love you for letting us indulge.

Hit Jeff over the head with a virtual frying pan at jeff_green@ziffdavis.com.

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL SLACK

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